

No 33

5 Cents.

WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY WEEKLY. EVERY WEEK.

AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP; OR, DARING TO CALL HIS SOUL HIS OWN.

By ROB ROY.



"You cur!" panted Tom, thrusting himself before the abused women. With a snarl Hoggins grabbed a club, but Stanley snatched up another. "I'll slam ye down them stairs!" bellowed the bully. "Brag's a sneak of a dog!" jeered the boy.

WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1906, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 33.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 30, 1906.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP

OR,

DARING TO CALL HIS SOUL HIS OWN

By ROB ROY

CHAPTER I.

"YOU YOUNG SCOUNDREL!" QUOTH THE BOSS.

"I wonder what ails the boss this morning?" asked one of the eight boys employed in the counting-room of Dobson & Co.

"Why?" asked Tom Stanley, who had just entered, a bit late, but flushed and happy-looking.

"He has an awful grouch on. He has sent for three or four of the fellows and has given them particular fits," went on the informant, in a low, hushed voice.

"Nothing new for him to be grouchy, is it?" asked Tom.

"Hush! Here comes Ralph Disney!"

"Well, I'm not afraid of Disney!" clicked Tom, decisively.

"But he carries yarns to the boss about every little thing," urged another youth.

"Supposing he does?" blurted Tom. "Then why don't you take him one side and punch him?"

"Huh! we'd get fired," grunted one of the boys.

"Hm! Suppose you did get fired?" asked Tom, carelessly. "Couldn't any of you get another job somewhere else?"

"You fellows make me tired," grumbled Stanley, in a voice that was half scorn and half indignation. "Here's Dobson, the boss. He's a big bully, a grumbler and a fault-finder. He has a trick of snatching your heads off half a dozen times a day. And you're all scared of him. You don't dare call your souls your own!"

Several of the boys looked sheepish at this charge. They glanced over at the rows of grown-up clerks, who stood behind desks.

These clerks were, to a man, as afraid of the grouchy and tyrannical boss as were the boys themselves.

Dobson was a bully, and a good deal of a scoundrel; they worked for Dobson, and so they took everything that he did. They suffered, and grew indignant in secret, but they never dared to think of rebelling.

Dobson was Eben, by first name. He was head of the great concern that dealt in all kinds of marble.

No one knew who the "Company" was, but all supposed that that "Company" was made up of silent partners who never came near the offices.

The marble yards of the great marble house of Dobson & Co. were at different points along both the North and the East Rivers, on the water front of New York City.

But the head offices of the concern were down in Pine Street, in the heart of the financial district of the great metropolis.

Dobson & Co. did such a tremendously large business in marble of all kinds that their only rivals of any importance in the Eastern States were Brander & Sons, whose offices were over in Wall Street, a little way below the Stock Exchange.

Some thirty clerks and nearly a half-score of boys composed the office force of Dobson & Co.

Old Eben Dobson almost invariably bullyragged this whole office force.

The only employees he ever treated with anything like decency were his outside salesmen, who landed his big outside orders for marble.

In the office, Dobson always kept one clerk whose business it was to spy upon the other clerks and carry tales to him.

Among the boys, too, old Dobson always kept his spy.

Just at present that spy was Ralph Disney, who now approached the group of boys in the counting-room corner.

"What are all you fellows loafing here and talking about?" demanded Ralph, with an air of consequence, as he came up to the group.

"Any particular business of yours, Disney?" asked Tom.

Disney flushed a bit under the other boy's sharp looks. But he came quickly back at our hero with:

"You're late this morning, Tom Stanley."

"Who made that any of your business?"

"Never you mind," flushed Ralph, darkly.

"But you're making it some of your business, eh?"

"Well, as an employee here," replied Ralph, "it's some of my business, in the faithful service of my employer, to know that things are running right."

"Indeed?" sneered Tom, while the other boys looked on in eager interest, knowing full well that valiant Tom was now to be depended upon to act as their champion. "That reminds me of something, Disney."

"What?" asked Ralph.

"It seems that yesterday I went out ten minutes before lunch time, and so stayed ten minutes over my time. It happened, though, that I was looking into something that I thought would interest the boss greatly."

"What was it?" asked Ralph.

"None of your business, as you're not the boss. But it looks as if some one had taken the trouble to run to the boss. Have you any idea who it was, Ralph Disney?"

Ralph fidgeted and looked uneasy under the eyes of all the other boys. But he answered:

"I'm not supposed to answer your questions, Tom Stanley."

"But you think I'm supposed to answer yours, eh?"

"That's different."

"Why different?" asked Tom, calmly. "Is it because you're playing the spy on us fellows? Is it because you run to the boss with every tale you can?"

"I might as well tell you, Tom Stanley," retorted Ralph, angrily, "that if you don't change your tune a good deal you're likely to be through in this office mighty soon."

"How do you know that?"

"Never mind how I know," Ralph returned, swelling with his own importance.

"Say, by the way, Ralph," ran on Tom, dropping into a tone that was anxious and almost friendly, "I'd like to tell you something. Come out into the corridor, will you, for a moment?"

Tom's voice was so soft that Disney never suspected. Filled with curiosity, the young spy stepped out of the counting-room into the corridor.

Though none of the other boys followed, they naturally peeped through the crack of the half-open door.

"Now be brief with what you've got to say, unless it's very important," requested Ralph Disney, with an imitation of old Dobson's mildest manner.

Tom wheeled, facing the young sneak with a smile that promised mischief.

"I wanted to tell you, Ralph, that you've got the reputation, in this office, of being the boss's puppy-dog and dirty-work ba-ba lamb."

"Was that what you called me out for?" cried Disney, angrily.

"Not altogether," smiled Tom. "I don't suppose that you'll take the trouble to deny that you tattled on me yesterday."

"I won't deny anything—to you," sneered the other boy.

"So this makes the third time that you've run and blabbed to the boss about me," Tom continued, with more of that same smile.

"I've got nothing to say," blustered Ralph.

"But I have!"

"What?"

"Three times is out! That's a rule of the game, Disney. Now I'm going to give you a lesson in minding your own business!"

"What are you getting smart about now?" flurried Ralph, though his face and a backward step proclaimed that he was beginning to be alarmed.

"Put up your hands, Disney—and put 'em up quick! I'm going to give you the first part of your lesson!"

"If you dare to hit me," faltered Ralph, "you'll be fired!"

"You miserable puppy-dog!"

With that, Tom Stanley hit straight out. His fist landed under Disney's chin, sending that youth to the floor in a heap.

"Murder!" wailed that youth.

"No; if isn't going to be as bad as that," Tom assured him, standing ready to send in a few more blows as soon as Disney should get on his feet.

"You get out of the way and leave me alone!" commanded the scared sneak, as he started to get up.

"Not until I've finished your lesson for you!" gritted Tom.

Swat! Biff! Stanley drove in a hard blow that landed on Disney's left ear. Ere Ralph could fall he followed up with another that smashed in on the sneak's nose, drawing blood.

Eben Dobson, coming softly, cat-like out of his private office, saw a group of boys peering through the crack of the door.

In a twinkling the boss himself had joined the group.

Then, with a muttered oath, he bounded out into the corridor, grabbing at Tom Stanley's collar.

"See here," thundered the boss, "what does this mean?"

"He hit me—for nothing!" cried Ralph, now leaping to his feet readily enough.

But Tom, disregarding him wholly, turned upon his employer.

"Mr. Dobson, will you kindly let go of my collar?"

"Huh!" retorted the boss, shaking our hero.

"When my father was a boy," Tom went on, coolly, "he once kicked a man good and plenty in the shins for not letting go of his collar."

"What do you mean, Stanley?"

"I'm afraid, sir, that trick may run in the blood!"

"Huh!" But Tom's voice was so quietly warning that Eben Dobson let go of his collar.

"You young scoundrel!" he roared.

"You're your own judge of manners, of course, Mr. Dobson," Tom went on, "but the language you're using to me is hardly the kind that you should use to a fellow who brings you news of important business."

"You? Important business?"

"I think you'll be very glad to hear what I've got to say—if I decide to say it," Tom retorted.

"Huh! You're too fresh for this office!"

"Then perhaps I'd better go without saying it," Tom proposed, independently.

"No, you won't," retorted Eben Dobson, his face suddenly purpling. "At least not until I've said something to you. I've got a good bit to say to you. Come along!"

The boss turned and strode through the counting-room to his office.

Tom followed, head high in the air.

Yet he was not fresh, and did not mean to be. But he could not be treated like a dog by any man.

"Close that door!" said Dobson, gruffly, when Tom had followed him into the inner office.

Tom closed the door, then faced Dobson, who stood leaning against the top of his roll-top desk.

His face was black with sudden anger.

"You young puppy," began the boss, harshly, "where were you last night?"

"Last night?" repeated Tom. "Why, a good part of the evening I was at a church club for young people."

"And after you left there?"

"I went home, after a while."

"To whose else home did you go first?"

Eben Dobson fairly thundered the question.

Tom started. The murder was out at last, then! It was a secret that Tom had wanted with all his heart to keep.

"Why, I went down past your home," the boy replied, slowly, but with dignity.

"Past my home? Yes! And stopped in front of my door for some little time! And who was with you, you young puppy?"

"Why, sir, your daughter permitted me to escort her home from the church," Tom answered, with more respect in his voice than he had shown in the last few minutes.

"Huh! Yes! Now, who told you you could escort my daughter home from anywhere?"

"As I remember it, sir, Miss Dorothy told me herself."

"Huh! Stop that, you young upstart!"

Tom stood mute.

"It isn't the first time, either; I hear that you have had the presumption to walk home with my daughter," Dobson went on, harshly.

"It won't be the last, by a long shot," Tom retorted, but he was wise enough to say it under his breath.

"Hereafter, you young upstart, you will not presume to see my daughter. Do you understand?"

"Am I to go blind?" Tom asked, with polite irony.

"You understand me, Stanley! You are not to speak to my daughter."

"Oh!"

"You understand me?"

"Yes."

"Then you will govern yourself accordingly," went on the boss.

Again Tom was silent.

"I suppose," sneered Dobson, "that since you're such a fresh youngster, anyway, that you've been forming dreams of marrying my daughter and taking a partnership in my firm. Such things sometimes happen in story books, I believe, but you can be very sure, Stanley, that such things won't happen in my family."

"I have never had the slightest idea of earning a partnership here," Tom replied, coolly.

"But you have been casting sheep's eyes at my daughter, eh? Stop it! It won't do you a bit of good."

"Shall I speak about the other matter now, sir?" Tom asked, patiently.

"What other matter?" asked the old man, sharply.

"A matter connected with the business here. I think I can show you how to make a lot of money that you wouldn't otherwise make."

"So you have got the partnership bee in your young bonnet?" sneered Eben Dobson.

"No, sir. Do you wish to hear about the matter that I have to propose?"

"I think," sneered the pig-headed man, "that I have heard all I wish to hear from you this morning."

"Oh, very good, sir."

Tom turned on his heel as if to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" thundered the old man.

"To leave the room."

"Who told you you could? Come back here!"

Patiently, Tom turned on his heels and again faced his employer.

"I can't stand you around here any longer," stormed Eben Dobson. "I am through with you."

"I'm very glad to hear that, sir," Tom replied, a smile breaking out on his face.

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, savagely.

"I'm very glad that I'm through working for you."

"Oh, you are, eh? Why?"

"Now that I'm not your employee, Mr. Dobson, I'll tell you. You're not a gentleman."

"Eh? You young beast! What's that? You young puppy!"

"Thank you," smiled Tom.

"For what?"

"For proving what I said, Mr. Dobson. You see, sir, you've made a lot of money, and you feel that you're at the top of the heap. You don't want people around here who dare to call their souls their own. I do dare to own my soul, and everything I've got except the services that I sell. You're at the top of the heap—yes, Mr. Dobson, but you won't always be, if you have the bad luck to live long enough. For the past five years, as I happen to know, your business has been gradually going to the bad. That's because you treat your people in such a boorish fashion that you can't get the best people to work for you."

"Get out of here, you puppy!"

"I'm going at once. Good-bye!"

With a cool smile, Tom turned and strode toward the door.

"Hold on, there!" cried Eben Dobson, bounding after him. "Where are you going now? What are you going to do?"

"As you're no longer my boss," Tom replied, halting at the door, "I don't know that it's any of your business where I'm going. But I don't object to telling you. I'm going over to Brander & Son. I'm going to tell them the news that I had meant to turn in to you."

"Stop!"

But Tom had closed the door from the other side.

Dobson stood still for a moment, quivering with rage over the conduct of this one boy who dared to call his soul his own.

Then the boss bounded out into the office.

He was just in time to see Tom Stanley, watched by every eye in the office, take down his hat.

"Here, put that hat back!" commanded Eben Dobson, in a towering rage.

But Tom, instead, placed the hat on his head.

"You and I agreed, Mr. Dobson," spoke the boy, in his cool, clear voice, "that I'd better stop working here."

"Go back to your desk, anyway, and work out your two weeks' notice."

"There isn't any notice coming," Tom rejoined. "You discharged me—told me to get out. That's what I'm doing."

Tom had reached the door to the corridor by this time, his hand on the knob.

"I'll bet ten dollars you're back, by afternoon, trying to get your job again," sneered Eben Dobson.

"I'll take the bet, Mr. Dobson, if you'll put up the money," laughed Tom. "And I'll make another bet that I'll be, within a half an hour, on the pay-roll of Brander & Son. Good day, sir!"

The door closed. Eben Dobson wheeled about to see appreciative grins on the faces of most of his down-trodden employees.

But, for once, the bully did not pay any heed.

Instead, he stepped swiftly over to his head clerk, whispering:

"Payson, get your hat and follow that boy. Be careful that he doesn't see you, though. Bring me back a report of what he does."

Eben Dobson slammed back into his office.

Left by himself, with a chance to sober down, he became savagely thoughtful.

"Going to Brander & Son, is he, the young puppy? He seems mighty confident. I suppose I was too hasty. I should have let him say what he wanted to say, anyway. Brander & Son? They've been crowding me mighty hard lately."

CHAPTER II.

DOING REAL BUSINESS WITH A REAL FIRM.

As Payson, head clerk and toady to Eben Dobson, hurried down to the sidewalk, Tom Stanley vented a low chuckle.

"The late boss is up to his old tricks," smiled the boy.

For Tom, suspecting some such move as this, had hidden himself in a doorway nearby.

"Poor old Payson!" murmured the boy. "He's been working for Dobson so long that he doesn't know how to be a man. He can't help it, now. I will help the poor fellow out."

Stepping boldly from his place of covert, Tom bounded up to the head clerk, slapping him on the shoulder.

"Going my way, Mr. Payson?" grinned the boy.

"Er—er—er—" stammered Payson, who was forty, slightly bald and very thin.

"Oh, of course, you can't help it," smiled Tom. "It's the boss's way and you can't help it. You've given old Dobson a mortgage on your soul, and he's foreclosing all the time. So you've been sent to follow me. I'll save you all that trouble, Payson. We'll walk along there, arm-in-arm."

"Er—er—you're laboring under something of a mistake," rejoined the head clerk.

"Am I?" asked Tom, innocently. "See here, Payson, I supposed that you had been sent to see where I went. If that's the case, we'll walk together."

"Nothing of the sort," replied the head clerk.

"No? No use you trying to fool me, Payson. If you say you're not sent to follow me, then I'm going to start down the street on a run, and you'll get winded following, and I'll double around two or three blocks of these tall buildings and lose you."

Payson looked annoyed and worried.

"So, if you really do want to follow me," hinted the boy, "just walk along with me, for that's the only way you'll ever win out on your job."

"Stanley," replied the head clerk, stiffly, "I haven't the slightest interest in the world in knowing where you are going."

"Then you won't be disappointed, will you?" laughed Tom.

With that he bolted off through the crowd, leaving the toady of a head clerk gasping.

Tom was quickly satisfied that he had lost his man. Then he made his way direct to the Wall Street offices of Brander & Son.

"Whew! But ain't it mighty different here?" choked Tom, inwardly, as, stepping from the elevator in a handsome building, he pushed open a door and found himself in the Brander counting-room.

At one of the desks two clerks were laughing. A woman stenographer, smartly dressed and smiling slightly, was making her fingers fly over the keys of her machine. On her desk stood a vase of fresh flowers.

Every one of the forty people on this office staff appeared to be pleasantly and happily busy.

Just then the door of the private office opened and a clear-eyed, business-like man of thirty glanced out.

"Mr. Lawson," called this man in the doorway, "have you got that report figured out yet?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't have it ready for about twenty minutes yet."

"Take your time to do it well. Better call me up on my desk 'phone when you're ready to show the report to me."

"Yes, sir."

The private office door closed. Its opening had made no difference in the doings of any of the clerks.

Not one of them looked uneasy or scared.

"Folks must really get some show here, I reckon," flashed through Tom's mind.

Espying an office boy at a desk, he stepped over there.

"My name is Stanley," began our hero. "Neither of your employers will know the name, but I wish you'd say that I have some news that I think they'll be glad to get. Will you see if one of the partners can see me, please?"

"All right," nodded the boy, and went into the private office.

He was back in a moment.

"Mr. Brander wants to know if you're sure that you want to see him?" stated the office boy.

"Tell Mr. Brander, please, that my business is about a chance to get a big contract for marble. Tell him, please, that I happened to get the first information."

"Mr. Brander will see you inside of ten minutes," replied the boy, returning. "Can you wait?"

"I can always wait to do business," smiled Stanley. "Which Mr. Brander is going to see me?"

"Mr. Ned."

"Oh, the son?"

"Yep."

The fact that the boy referred to the junior partner as "Mr. Ned," rather than as "Mr. Edward," had a meaning for Tom.

It seemed to show that the junior partner was well liked in his own office, and that he did not object to being liked.

A few minutes later a bell rang.

The office boy jumped up, went into the private office, came back and said:

"Mr. Ned can see you now."

The same pleasant-faced young man looked up as our hero stepped into the softly carpeted private office.

"Your name is Stanley, eh?"

"Thomas Stanley, Mr. Brander."

"I hear that you have some information about a chance to place a contract for our goods?"

"I have, yes. You won't mind, Mr. Brander, if I ask if you're willing to pay for such news if it proves to be of value?"

"Of course not," smiled the junior partner. "We're ready to pay for anything in our line—always provided that it has a real value to us."

"My news," Tom went on, "relates to the erection of some new college buildings. About a million is to be spent on the buildings, and I figure that at least a quarter of that amount will go for marble."

"Why, sit down, please," smiled Mr. Ned, blandly. "That's good news, if true. And, of course, it must be true or you wouldn't bring it. But I haven't heard of any new college buildings being planned."

"Of course you haven't," nodded Tom. "If you had, my information wouldn't be worth anything to you."

"Where is this college, and who is planning to build it?"

"Mr. Brander, you won't mind my asking what terms I can get, if my information proves valuable to you?"

"Not at all," replied the young man, thoughtfully. "Yet you'll understand, Stanley, that it's rather difficult to name the right price on a pig in poke or on a cat in a bag."

"Very difficult, I admit, Mr. Brander. But I have an idea. Suppose I give you this news and you go ahead and land some orders. Wouldn't it be a fair idea for me to get a small percentage on the exact amount of business that you get through the tip?"

"Very fair," nodded the junior partner, thoughtfully. "Now let us see. You say that the contracts ought to be worth somewhere around a quarter of a million? Suppose we act on your information and land the contracts? The information ought to be worth something, of course. Yet, important as the information might be, the work of landing the contracts is still more important. Hence, we should expect to pay much more to the salesman who got the contracts than we would to the one who gave us the information."

"That's right, sir," nodded Tom, promptly.

The junior partner did some figuring, then looked up.

"I should say, Stanley, that a one per cent. commission would be about right for your information."

"It will suit me, sir."

"Good! Then go ahead with your information. Do you know anything about our reputation for dealing fairly?"

"It was that knowledge that brought me here, Mr. Brander."

"I wonder you didn't go, first of all, to——" began the junior partner, with a trace of a smile.

"To Eben Dobson?" hinted Tom. "Well, to be honest, I did."

"Oho!"

"I felt rather bound to," Tom went on, as young Brander's brow clouded a trifle. "You see, sir, up to half an hour ago, I was in Mr. Dobson's employ."

"And you got your information in his office?"

"I did not. I got the information outside, in a way not in the least connected with my service with Mr. Dobson. Yet, as I say, being in his employ, I felt that I ought to take the news to him."

"And so you did, eh?"

"As it happened, Mr. Brander, I did not."

"Explain yourself."

"Before I could see Mr. Dobson," Tom went on, "I had occasion to trounce a young tale-bearer in the office—a fellow who has been spying upon all the boys there. Mr. Dobson caught me at that rather pleasant task, and he discharged me before I had chance to give him the information."

"Then Dobson knows nothing about this matter—these college buildings?"

"No, sir."

"He does not know that you came here?"

"I told him that I was going to."

Mr. Ned asked a few more questions about the difficulty, though only such questions as he really needed answers to.

"Why, it seems to me, Stanley, that I can properly trade with you for the information. All I wanted was to make sure that I was not encouraging a rival's employee to betray my rival."

"I am not Eben Dobson's employee, Mr. Brander, and I shall be very glad to become your employee. Moreover, this information is something that Mr. Dobson does not possess."

"Very good, then," replied the junior partner, decisively. "Where is this college, and who is building it?"

"May I make one more stipulation, Mr. Brander?"

"What is it?"

"I want to get ahead in the world, and it seems to me that I should have the chance when I show myself worth it."

"Certainly. Every one is entitled to go as far ahead in the world as his abilities entitle him to travel."

"Will you give me the first chance to try to land the contract for the marble for the college in question?"

Mr. Ned looked thoughtful.

"That is a more important consideration, Stanley. When one goes out to sell, we must feel that he is highly qualified. A poor salesman not only fails for himself, but usually prevents his employer from sending a better man in his steps afterward."

"But I think I know the goods," Tom urged.

"Do you?" asked the junior partner, picking up one of the trade samples of marble that lay on his desk. "What kind of marble is this?"

"Para marble, of a very fair second grade in quality," the boy replied, after carefully looking over the specimen.

"And this?"

"Red Venetian."

"And this?"

"Red Venetian, also, of a somewhat poorer quality."

"And this?"

Tom took the next specimen in his hand, then looked up, smiling.

"I don't believe this is any of your own goods, Mr. Brander. It's a good imitation of marble, but it isn't marble at all. It is a composition known as marbeline. It looks all right, at first, but after two or three years, especially in a damp climate, it begins to crack."

"Why, you're rather clever," mused Mr. Ned. "I didn't know that any of this marbeline had been seen in New York yet."

"I don't know anybody that handles it, sir, but I've seen samples."

"Where?"

"At the building exchange. I can tell you how marbeline is made, if you wish me to."

"Go ahead."

Tom swiftly and accurately described the process of making artificial marble.

Then Mr. Ned handed him a powerful magnifying glass.

"Explain what the glass shows you in some of these samples."

Tom did so, and to the satisfaction of the junior partner.

"What do you know about buying and selling prices?"

"Won't you try me and see, sir?" Tom asked.

This examination, too, passed off to the satisfaction of both.

"What have you been doing with Dobson?"

"Why, I was a little more than office boy."

"How much did he pay you?"

"Seven dollars a week."

"And now you want to come here and become a high-grade salesman?" laughed Mr. Brander.

"I think I'm qualified to be, sir."

"But, as office boy, how on earth did you ever pick up all this knowledge of marble at Dobson's?"

"Some of my knowledge and ideas I got there, Mr. Brander. But most of it I didn't."

"Where?"

"I gained much by putting in most of my lunch hour at the Building Exchange. Then, when I could, I went around among contractors, stone masons and the like."

"But they never taught you the composition of marble and of its imitations."

"No, Mr. Brander. But I belong to a church club, and one of the men who is greatly interested in the success of that club happens to be a chemist. I made him take a good deal of interest in me, and he has taught me, I don't know how many things, about marble."

"You're a bright boy!" cried Mr. Ned, looking at the youngster in honest admiration.

"Opinions differ, then," smiled Tom. "Mr. Dobson told me I was miles too fresh."

"I guess the trouble is," smiled Mr. Ned, "that Dobson is too stupid and too pig-headed. Now, see here, Stanley, I can't make an out-and-out promise as just what we can do with you on the salesman end of this college business. But we'll do our honest best by you, all according to the ability that you show in the matter. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, sir. And now for the information. The place in question is Burdick College, at Rowena, Ohio. The college has been running for some years. But a Mr. John Stacey, of Cincinnati, has decided to give a million-dollar set of new buildings to Burdick. He is going to control the building work, and that sort of thing, so he is the man to see in the matter."

"And where is Stacey now?"

"He was in New York last night, but left on the midnight train for Cincinnati."

"We must close in on him at once," mused Mr. Ned.

"You are going to let me try him first?"

"Yes, I think so. Come in at two o'clock and be ready to talk it over with father and myself. In the meantime, let me have your references, and I'll look them up."

Tom gave two references, one of them being his pastor, the other the chemist who had taught him so much about marble.

"Oh, by the way," asked Mr. Ned, as Tom was going, "you have money enough?"

"I have a few dollars."

"Would you like this on account?" asked the junior partner, holding out a ten-dollar bill.

"I don't need it, thank you."

"All right. We'll see you at two o'clock, then."

Finding that there was a rear entrance to the building, Tom slipped out that way.

"If Payson is hanging around outside, he won't earn his money to-day," chuckled the boy.

That afternoon he returned, had a long talk with both of the Branders and received permission to make the first try at wealthy John Stacey, multi-millionaire shirtmaker of Cincinnati.

"It's your chance," smiled Mr. Ned, "to show whether you're really as smart as you think you are. The boy always thinks he's ready to become a man at once. This is your opportunity to show whether you're fitted to stop being a boy and become a man."

"I'll make good!" promised Tom Stanley, with tremendous energy.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL IN THE CASE.

There was nothing so very wonderful in Tom's having that information about the rich man who was to provide Burdick College with new million-dollar buildings.

Stacey, having more money than he could possibly use, and having no near relatives to leave it to, was spending a good deal of his wealth in helping others.

While in New York, Mr. Stacey had dropped in at the same church club of which Tom Stanley was a member.

Tom, approaching the chemist, Dr. Weissman, to speak to him, found Mr. Stacey at his side.

"Mr. Stacey," laughed the chemist, presenting our hero, "here is a young man who doesn't need to have any one build a college for him. He goes right ahead by himself. He has pumped me dry on all I know relating to his branch of business."

Mr. Stacey shook hands with Tom and chatted with him for a few moments.

Then the boy withdrew. As he walked slowly away, however, he overheard Mr. Stacey saying to Dr. Weissman:

"I am glad to be able to say, doctor, that at last I find myself able to give that million-dollar gift to Burdick College. We shall begin very soon to put up the new white marble buildings, and I shall supervise the work and the contracts myself."

"Marble, eh?" flashed Tom to himself. "That's my line of business. This'll be worth looking into."

Later in the evening Tom managed to draw out Dr. Weissman quite a bit regarding the new college buildings.

Then Tom saw Dorothy Dobson to her door.

On the way he felt greatly tempted to tell her the news of interest to her father that he had gleaned.

But, for some reason, the boy had not done so.

Now, nearly twenty-four hours later, our hero was wholly glad that he had held his peace.

At the meeting with the two partners of the Brander firm, Tom had received final permission to try to sell Brander marbles to Mr. John Stacey.

More than that, he had received a modest amount of expense money for his trip to Cincinnati.

"Off on the road at last as a salesman," the boy kept murmuring to himself on his ride homeward on the elevated railroad.

Reaching "home," he hurried to the little top-floor room, which he and his chum, Bob Ellert, occupied together.

Bob was employed in a wholesale grocery at six dollars a week.

With their combined salaries the boys managed to pay their room rent, buy their food and always present a fairly good appearance.

In addition, Tom took careful enough charge of his income so that he always had a few dollars left in his pocket.

"I can afford to take Bob out to a good supper tonight," thought Tom, as he bounded up the stairs.

But Bob was not yet in.

"Oh, well, I'll wait a little while," thought Tom, who was flushed from his fast speed down the street through the keen fall air.

He lighted the gas and sat down to read the evening paper.

He read it through, but still Bob did not put in an appearance.

"Bob's working overtime to-night, I guess," he mused. "At all events, where Bob works they pay extra for over-

time. But it's seven o'clock now and I've simply got to eat that supper if I want to attend to that other matter."

"That other matter" was neither more nor less than seeing Miss Dorothy before he started West.

He knew that she was due to return to her home, over on Fifth Avenue, a little after nine in the evening.

She would ride in her carriage this evening, and undoubtedly alone, as Eben Dobson rarely took the trouble to go out with his daughter.

"I can see her for a minute, anyway," thought Tom. "I wonder if she is going to side with her father and turn me down?"

The thought gave him a queer little feeling, almost like a chill.

"Dorothy isn't the girl I think she is if she turns me off altogether," thought Tom, half bitterly.

He remembered how he had first met her.

An orphan boy, a stranger in the city, he had been persuaded to join the church club.

Here he had met Dot, who, despite her youthfulness, was one of the workers for the club.

She had taken an almost instant liking to Tom Stanley.

Learning that he was without employment, she coaxed her father into giving the boy a chance in his offices.

Tom had done well from the start, though Eben Dobson seldom admitted as much.

Our hero's supper, without the company of lively Bob, was soon over with.

Out in the street, he ran plump into his chum at a street corner.

"Why, Bob, I've been looking everywhere for you. I've struck luck and wanted to celebrate it with a bang-up supper. But you were so late."

"Had to work overtime," Bob replied, briefly.

"Have you had supper?"

"Nope."

"Then you've got to eat on me to-night. Feed well, too."

Tom forced some money into his chum's pocket.

Standing, as they were, just around the corner of a building, they did not see Ralph Disney, Dobson's boy spy, hurry by and recognize them.

Just past the corner of the building Ralph halted, where he could hear every word.

"Why, you seem to have struck luck!" cried Bob.

"I have."

"What's up?"

"Dobson fired me this morning."

"Call that luck?" demanded Bob, drily.

"Yes, sir. I've got a better job. Say, Bob, I'm going traveling."

"On the road, old fellow?"

"Just that! Bob, I've got the biggest kind of a job, and the beauty of it is that I stumbled on it for myself. Funny, too. I was going to tell Dobson all about the snap this morning, when he got so ugly with me. He wouldn't even listen, and I'm glad now that he didn't. So a big thing in the business line goes to Brander & Son."

"Does, does it?" uttered listening Ralph Disney, just around the corner. "We'll see about that."

"Much money in it for you?" asked Bob Ellert, eagerly.

"Money?" smiled Tom. "Why, if I manage to put this thing through, I'll make more money in a short time than I'd get with old Dobson in years."

"What is the scheme? The job?"

Ralph Disney cocked his ears eagerly, not daring to breathe.

"Bob, old fellow, you won't feel hurt if I don't tell you just now, will you? But it's my new firm's business, and it isn't started yet."

"Why, of course, I won't feel hurt," cried Bob, cheerily. "What a fool I'd be to feel hurt! But say, isn't this job of yours, if it goes through, going to make grouchy old Dobson feel as sore as a boil?"

"Is it?" flashed Tom. "Why, he'd give five thousand dollars, right now, to know what I'm up to."

"Then say, old fellow," proposed Bob, anxiously, "how is it going to affect your standing with Miss Dorothy?"

"I wish I knew the answer," uttered Tom, glumly. "But I'm going to try to find out to-night."

"Then I won't keep you waiting here," hinted Bob. "Success, old fellow, and I'll see you later to-night."

"Hardly, Bob. Later to-night I leave for—well, I start on the road. I'm going back to the room now, for my bag, take that to the depot on the jump and then off to see Miss Dorothy. Make that supper a good one, Bob. Good-bye, old fellow!"

As the two chums wrung each other's hands, Ralph Disney stole off on tip-toe. When a little way off he increased his speed to a run.

"Oh, won't old Dobson be tickled to hear what I've got to tell him!" breathed Disney, exultantly. "But hang that fool, Stanley, why couldn't he tell that other fellow just what the job is? I'd like to be able to take the whole thing to the boss. No matter, though! I guess the boss can manage to find out what it is. And I'll feel square for the black eye Tom Stanley gave me to wear!"

In the meantime our hero, all in ignorance of Ralph's discovery, got his grip and hurried up to the Grand Central Depot.

Buying his ticket and his berth check, Tom checked his baggage, next heading for Fifth Avenue.

A brisk walk of a few blocks brought him to the front of the Dobson house a little ahead of time.

"I wonder if my ex-boss is in there?" muttered the boy, as he stared up at the house lights. "Wouldn't he give a lot, though, to know just what I'm up to?"

At that very moment, however, Eben Dobson did know enough to make a world of trouble.

For Ralph Disney, going straight to his employer's house, had poured what he had learned into the boss's ear.

"I guess we can find a way to hinder young Stanley's scheme for injuring me," smiled Dobson, grimly.

Going into another room he telephoned, then came back to Ralph.

"Disney, you've done first-rate to-night," said the old man, with what was meant to be an encouraging smile, but what was really a most repulsive grin. I don't know yet just how much of a stroke it is, but I'm going to give you this on a chance."

"This" proved to be a ten-dollar bill, on which Ralph closed his fingers in keen delight.

"If your information proves to be worth more, you may be sure you'll get your further reward," Eben Dobson beamed on. "Disney, you're a good example of the faithful employee. If you keep on as you've begun I shall see that your promotion is as rapid as it deserves to be."

"I always try to live up to a high sense of duty," whined the young spy, meekly.

"Now, say nothing about this matter to anyone," continued Mr. Dobson.

"Oh, sir, I won't! Believe me, I won't!" protested the young toady.

"Listen to anything, whenever you get a chance, but never make any move, or take any action, until you have asked me," continued the boss.

"Most certainly not," murmured young Disney.

"And that young scoundrel, who left my employ in order to be better able to injure me, is going to try to meet my daughter to-night?"

"So he said, sir."

"Huh! Hm! You wait here, Disney!"

Eben Dobson went softly to his own front door. He stepped into the vestibule before he remembered that the outer door was of wood.

So back into the dark drawing-room he went, taking up his stand behind a lace curtain.

But the carriage had drawn up to the steps a few moments before.

"You, Tom?" murmured Dorothy Dobson, as our hero stepped forward.

Mike Courtenay, the coachman, and fast friend of young Miss Dot, closed his eyes, so to speak, as he inquired:

"All right, Miss?"

"All right, Michael, thank you," the girl replied.

Mike thereupon drove away, fearful that he might see too much.

"Miss Dorothy," began Tom, eagerly, "do you mind walking just a little way down the block with me?"

"I suppose I ought not to," she murmured.

"Oh! Then you have heard——"

"Yes; and I'm going to take this little short walk with you," flashed the girl, her eyes lighting.

She let her hand rest on his arm as they turned away.

All this had happened just a few moments before Eben Dobson reached his post of observation.

"Miss Dorothy, then you know that I'm in disgrace with your father?" Tom began.

"I know that you've displeased him in some way."

"We couldn't get along, Miss Dorothy, in the same office. That's all I'm going to say about that. But what I

want most fearfully to know is whether—whether it's going to make any difference—between you and me?"

"I shan't stop being interested in you, if that's what you mean," the girl answered, rather softly.

"You won't believe any wrong of me?"

"Why, of course I wouldn't," replied the girl, with such prompt honesty that Tom Stanley's heart gave a jump.

"But how can I see you, after this?" Tom wondered.

"At the church club, even if nowhere else."

"But if your father should tell you not to go there?"

"I don't think he will."

"Miss Dorothy, you won't mind if I write to you, will you?"

"Why? Are you going away?"

"Only for a very little while. But—if your father tries to stop your seeing me—may I write you?"

"I—I suppose I ought to say 'no,'" hesitated the girl.

"But you won't say that, will you? You won't be so cruel?"

"Why, would it bother you very much not to see me?" the girl asked, simply.

"It would take all the pleasure out of life not to see you, or hear from you!" Tom cried, tremulously.

"Then, if anything happens that you do not see me, you may write me."

"And, if I write you, you will tell me of some way in which I can see you, won't you, Miss Dorothy?"

"Why—if—if I can properly," she promised, and Tom respected her too much to ask her to promise more than that.

Eben Dobson, having waited in vain at the window, now snatched up a hat and went out on the stoop.

Down the street he saw his daughter and Tom Stanley walking side by side. The old man gave a gasp, then hurried angrily to them.

"Dorothy," he exploded, "go into the house instantly. What do you mean by being out with this young scoundrel? Do you realize that he has sneaked out of my employ and is trying to hurt me in my business?"

"Why, papa, you—I——"

"Walk into the house this instant, young lady!" thundered her father, in his most bully-like tone.

Dorothy turned and walked away, obediently, but she called, softly over her shoulder:

"Good night, Tom!"

"Good night, Miss Dorothy!"

Eben Dobson snorted twice, but he watched in silence until he saw the door close on the girl.

Then, in a fury, he turned upon the boy.

"You young puppy, how dare you meet my daughter—you, an utter sneak! How dare you address my daughter?"

"Your daughter?" flared Tom, stung to madness and hardly realizing what he was saying. "Bah! That sweet girl is no daughter of yours!"

"Wha—what's that?" gasped Eben Dobson, reeling and clutching at the fence.

He shook, as if with ague, his face turning to a sickish, greenish white.

He seemed like a very old man, and palsied into the bargain. For an instant his eyes seemed to protrude as if he were going to have a fit.

Then he choked, gulped down something, and took a brace on himself.

"You impudent young upstart! Get out of here! Go along! Run! Vamoose!"

"This is the first time I've heard that you bossed the streets of New York," taunted the boy.

Then, realizing that it looked none too well for him to stand here blackguarding the father of Dorothy, Tom suddenly turned and walked away.

"Now, why did he look so funny when I told him Dorothy was no daughter of his?" wondered the boy, the hot blood surging through the veins of his head. "Jupiter! Did I, without meaning it, touch upon any sore spot?"

Stanley walked briskly down to Forty-second Street, turning in at the railway station.

Had he had any reason to suspect it, he might have discovered that Eben Dobson was actually trailing him.

But Tom never thought of such a thing. Even the old man's charge that our hero was trying to injure him in business did not occur to Tom as meaning anything in especial.

The ex-boss did not know anything exact about Stanley's business with the new firm. How could he?

So Tom turned in at the depot, wholly unaware of the fearful trouble that was hatching for him.

"I'll think over to-night's meeting a good deal," reflected the boy. "Old Dob has always thought himself so high up at the top of the heap that nobody could reach him. Maybe I'll find the weak spot in his shell. Jupiter! Wouldn't it be fierce if I really hit the nail on the head when I said Dorothy wasn't his daughter? Whew! But I'll think that over!"

Eben Dobson turned in at the depot, to be accosted by a broad-shouldered man of medium height.

The fellow had a rugged face, but there was not enough of depravity in his look to warn an inexperienced person against him.

"You see, I'm here," he whispered.

"See that boy ahead—that one halfway down to the gate, who carries his head so high?"

"Yes," whispered the stranger.

"Find out where he is bound for, Carman."

The broad-shouldered one slouched softly forward, while Dobson fell back more out of sight.

Tom found that his train would not be "made up" for half an hour yet.

He glanced into his pocketbook to make sure that his tickets were all right.

A twinkling later, as Tom neared a crowd, Carman jostled into him, then apologized.

As the broad-shouldered one turned away he had Tom's pocketbook.

A single look inside, and Carman knew what he wanted.

Presently, Tom Stanley, to his great surprise, on thrusting a hand into a side jacket pocket, found his pocketbook there.

"Why, confound it," he murmured, "I thought I put that in my inside pocket. I've got to be a blamed sight more careful."

"The kid has a through ticket to Cincinnati, and upper fourteen for his berth in the Pullman car," Carman softly reported to Dobson.

"Cincinnati?" repeated Dobson, thickly. "See here, Carman, I meant for you to follow that boy, but I want you to do more. I sha'n't be worried if he never comes back. Do you understand?"

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE MIX-UP.

Whether from the excitement of the day through which he had passed, or because of the motion of the train, to which he was unused, Tom Stanley did not sleep well.

Once in a while he dozed slightly, for an instant, as he lay in the berth known as upper-four.

Carman had made a slight mistake.

Tom's berth was upper-four—not upper-fourteen, which was at the further end of the car.

"I wonder why they call these sleeping-cars?" grimaced the boy, as he lay and tossed. "If this is a sleeping car, I can't take the trick."

The train, plunging along over some country curves at the rate of forty miles an hour, was rocking and lurching a good deal.

"Hanged if I see how they ever ship cream over a railroad," muttered the boy. "I should think it'd turn up as butter at the other end of the trip!"

Fumbling for his watch, he poked a hand through the curtains, reading the time by the dim night light of the sleeper.

"Almost two o'clock," he discovered. "Wonder what time in the morning folks have to get up on a sleeping-car?"

While he lay there, wide awake, during the next few minutes, he heard the forward door of the car open and close.

Two men trod softly in, halting beside Stanley's berth, their heads about on a level with his own.

Just as it happened, at that moment Tom was lying with his head resting on his raised hand, supported by his elbow, his eyes toward the outer edge of the bunk.

Something moved the curtain slightly by his head.

"Horrors!" throbbed the boy. "Old Eb Dobson's face, as I'm alive! Now, what in the name of sin is he doing on this train? Has he found out what I'm after? Is he going himself for his house?"

Tom was just barely aware that there was another man with Dobson.

As cautiously as ever he could, our hero pulled the curtain aside a trace in order to get a look at that other man.

It was Carman, but Tom did not recognize him as the jostler of the railway station.

"This is the car—sure?" Dobson asked, warily.

"Yes," replied Carman.

"And you've got the berth pat?"

"Sure! Didn't I see the berth check?"

"And you know what you're to do?"

"Don't you be afraid!" replied Carman, with horrible meaning.

Palpitating Tom, staring at both through the smallest possible crack between the curtain end and the berth frame, felt a wave of sickness pass over him as he gazed at the faces of the two men.

Then our hero let the curtain slip over the crack.

He fell back, shuddering, for the meaning of that scene just before his eyes, coupled with the words he had heard and what he knew of one of the men, made the meaning of it all only too horribly plain.

"So that's the kind of a crook old Dobson is?" chattered the boy, as he hugged the outer wall of the car.

"Good-by, then," whispered Eben Dobson. "Good luck!"

"Sure!"

For an instant Stanley meditated jumping out of the berth, just after he heard the forward door slam.

But that door-slam, in itself, was so muffled by the noises of the train that the boy told himself, uneasily:

"Probably not a soul would hear me until it was too late!"

One of his hands happened to touch, lightly, the bell with which the car porter could be summoned from his little room at the rear end of the train.

That gave Tom an inspiration.

"If that fellow puts his hands through the curtains I'll ring this bell like a fire alarm!"

So after that Tom waited, listened, wondered.

What could make old Dobson's villain so slow—so long in beginning his move, whatever it was?

Then, finally, Tom wondered:

"Was this a nightmare, after all? Was I asleep, and did I dream it? I'm going to take a look outside."

Cautiously Tom drew one of the curtains aside, ever so little.

"Why, there's no one out here," he grumbled. "Dream, after all! But it was a mighty real one!"

Carman, in the meantime, believing that upper-fourteen held his prey, had gone slowly by on tip-toe, listening.

From upper-fourteen came the sound of regular, heavy breathing, punctuated every now and then by a soft, peaceful, comfortable snore.

"Asleep," thought the scoundrel, exultantly. "There won't be any muss, then."

Yet the villain walked back to the rear end of the car before proceeding to his grim business.

He glanced into the little, cupboard-like room of the porter.

That guardian of the car's safety lay back, dozing splendidly.

"Good for you!" chuckled the rascal, softly, turning on his heel and pausing an instant ere he returned to upper-fourteen.

All the car was quiet, so far as human beings were concerned.

Carman's hand went in under his vest, clutching at the handle of a knife.

Carman was wary, but not over-nervous.

Satisfied that the field was as clear now as it would be at any time in the night, he stopped at upper-fourteen.

His left hand pulled the curtain a bit.

Then steel flashed in his right hand and went swiftly behind the curtain.

In a jiffy more there came a bellow like that of a bull, the words:

"Ye dirty coyote, what——"

Bump! Crash! Jar-r-r-r! Bump!

Everything seemed, in an instant, to be falling down hill.

Jolt! Jar!—and then an indescribable crash.

Scores of people woke up, shrieking.

There were yells of pain, and the agonized sighs of the dying.

Just as Carman made his thrust and was discovered—ere he could carry out his purpose or the big man in upper-fourteen could get square, the train had plunged squarely, headlong into wreck.

And now the train lay, almost shuddering like a living thing, overturned at the side of the track.

An open switch, as it was afterwards discovered, had caused this dread catastrophe of the night.

In the instant of that first crash, Tom, with his finger still against the bell button, fell with his whole weight pressing.

As the car lurched, toppled, then slid over the banking, that bell rang as if it never would stop.

But suddenly it did stop, before, in fact, any but the porter knew that it was ringing.

For Tom had suddenly sprang forward, as he felt the car overturn.

His outstretching hands caught at the edge of the berth, holding on wildly.

That stopping of the capsized cars was fearful—costing some of the ill-fated passengers their lives.

But Tom, partly by miracle, and partly through clinging desperately to the edge of the berth, now above his head, saved himself the worst of the jolt.

Then, when all was still, he slid back against the wall of the overturned car.

His heart was beating almost to suffocation.

"Is anything more coming?" he wondered, dumbly, numbly.

But the car appeared to have stopped in its destructive jolting.

"Help! Oh, somebody come to me—in heaven's name! I'm dying!" screamed a voice in the same car.

Tom shuddered again.

Then, after stirring, and realizing that he was not crippled, he set about climbing out of the berth.

It was a curious sight that he saw in the car—scantly clad people, some with blood stains on their night-clothing, trying to get out of the wrecked car.

"Hold on, old fellow," muttered the boy. "You'll be just as much use here if you remember to get your clothes out of here with you!"

In his underclothing, after pulling on his shoes, Tom crawled out with his clothing in his hands.

It was a fearful scene that lay before his eyes.

Several people had been killed, but the three trainmen who had escaped serious injury were first of all bringing out those who had been hurt.

At the same time, passengers were rallying to the help of those injured or in peril.

Two of the day coaches ahead of the Pullman section had caught fire.

"Every one help here!" bellowed a big man, who took the lead. "We must get out the living! Never mind the dead now!"

"Help! help!" screamed one frantic voice from the Pullman just ahead of that in which Tom had lain.

Stanley started. He knew that heavy voice for Dobson's.

For an instant the boy hesitated, then worked his way into the overturned car.

In the dark, or near-dark, for only one lamp was burning dimly, Tom stumbled over the bodies of a man and woman, both dead.

Then he came upon Eben Dobson.

He was lying in the aisle of the car, pinned by two cross-bars of steel that had been partly wrenched from the roof of the car.

"Can't you get out, Mr. Dobson?" cried the boy, reaching his former boss.

"If I could, you young fool, I'd be out of here," snorted the old man. "Oh, that's you, Stanley, is it? Go and get a man or two—some one who can do something."

"All the folks not hurt are pretty busy," Tom rejoined. "The two cars ahead are on fire."

"Afire!" shrieked Eben Dobson. "Good Lord! Then this car will burn in a jiffy!"

"Oh, we'll get you out before that, Mr. Dobson," promised the boy.

"Hustle, you young scamp! Run! Don't let me stay here to be burned alive! Hurry—in heaven's name!"

"Let me see what I can do, first," urged the boy, bending over his former employer.

He saw, quickly enough, what was the matter. Eben Dobson, though otherwise unhurt, had both legs pinned down by the steel beams.

"Try to wriggle out while I pull on your shoulders," urged Tom, seizing Dobson under the arm-pits.

"Are you going to get help, or let me die here?"

"I'll try to get help, if I can't get you out alone. Now—fight! Try to wriggle out while I pull!"

Both worked together with a will. Then Dobson cried out, piteously:

"If you don't get some one else quick, I'll be burned alive!"

Tom tried to move the steel beams, even ever so slightly, but they were fast wedged.

"I'll give one more tug at your shoulders. Fight, now!"

Again they struggled. In the effort, Dobson turned partly over.

Out of his inner coat pocket dropped a wallet and a letter.

"Here, put those back in my pocket!" screamed Dobson. "Put 'em back, I say!"

Tom quickly picked them up. As he did so, he could hardly help seeing that the envelope was addressed to Eben Dobson, while in the upper left-hand corner was the address of a Mrs. Emma Wrenn, in Cleveland.

"Put those things back in my pocket," insisted Dobson again, and Tom quickly thrust them in place.

"I'm going to see if I can get any one to help now," Tom promised, bounding away.

"You manage to get me out of here, Tom Stanley," the old man bellowed after him, "and I'll see that you're made for life!"

Tom darted out among those, trainmen and passengers, who were fighting to rescue the imperilled from the two burning cars ahead.

"Can two or three of you men spare time to come back for a minute or two?" shouted Tom. "There's an old man back here who can't get out without help. Bring one of those crowbars!"

Even as he was speaking, Tom picked out his three men, one of whom had secured a crowbar from among the train's wrecking tools.

Tom led them back into the car.

For the next ten minutes these three men and the boy worked with a will, Dobson all the while crying out in frantic terror.

Though the steel beams could be shifted somewhat, they could not be moved enough to enable the trapped man to escape.

The under steel beam still pinned him down, helpless.

"Now, then, all together, and quick!" appealed Tom, as a cloud of smoke poured into the car.

"Good Lord! This car is catching fire!" screamed Eben Dobson. "Oh, hurry, in the name of heaven! Use more strength! Do something!"

But though the men worked with their utmost strength, all bearing down on the crowbar every time they got it placed differently, the forward end of the car began to burn, and still Eben Dobson was pinned down.

"Surely you can do something!" shrieked the frenzied wretch.

"Yes; we can escape with our own lives, since nothing will save this man," muttered one of the dripping rescuers.

"Don't leave me!" implored Dobson, as he saw the men turning.

"It's tough, friend, but we've got to," retorted one of the men, huskily. "All we can do by staying is to lose our own lives. Come on, youngster."

"I can't go yet," and Tom shook his head. "The fire isn't close enough yet."

"It isn't the flames. It's the current of blazing hot air that is sweeping in. That hot air will keel you over in a few seconds more. Come—while there's time!"

But, though the men fled, Tom did not even answer them.

He had grabbed up the crowbar and was again working furiously, trying new leverages under the steel beams.

"Get me out of this, for the love of heaven, Tom Stanley," implored Dobson. "I'll do everything in the world for you if you save me!"

Tom did not answer, but suddenly his heart bounded with joy when he succeeded in moving that under beam ever so little.

"Now, you can get out!" panted Tom. "Hurry! It's an awful strain holding up this beam alone. Quick!"

Trembling, almost fainting, Eben Dobson managed to crawl out.

But then terror made him so weak that he could not stand.

Tom hesitated not an instant, but snatching up the old man he staggered out of the car, dragging him.

A yell of enthusiasm went up as Tom staggered out into the blaze-lit scene and dropped his human burden a score of feet from the blazing car.

"Tom Stanley, I'll never forget this," muttered Eben Dobson. "You stick close to me, after this, and I'll make you, as you've saved me."

"I'm afraid I can't talk about that now, Mr. Dobson," the boy answered, simply. "But one of these days I'll have a talk with you in New York."

Nine killed, twenty-three seriously injured. That was the way the newspapers told of that railway crash. It was forgotten in another day.

After the wrecking gang from division headquarters had done their work, another train took the passengers along on their interrupted journey.

Eben Dobson, finding himself uninjured, save for his scare, speedily forgot his promises of gratitude to the boy who had risked his life for that of the worthless old bully and scoundrel.

"He saw that envelope. He may remember. That youngster would make all the trouble in the world if he could," muttered Dobson to himself.

He did not travel onward on the same train with our hero.

But Carman, whom both supposed our hero did not know, did go on that same train. The Westerner, whom Carman had come near stabbing, was also on that train, but did not recognize the fellow.

"Watch that boy," was Dobson's parting injunction. "I don't care what happens to him. You understand, Carman?"

CHAPTER V.

A SMALL DOG IN A BIG CARCASS.

"Why should I buy the marble from your people?" asked John Stacey.

"Because the people I represent will give you a squarer deal than you can get from any other house in our line in the United States. Let me show you the samples of our marbles, and explain them. Let me give you our prices. Then send the marbles to an expert for an opinion. Get the prices of other houses in our line. Do these things—and then you'll give us the order, Mr. Stacey."

For a whole day Tom had chased the millionaire manufacturer all over Cincinnati.

But this rich man and builder of colleges was such a busy, hustling person that Tom had failed to overtake him.

So our hero had taken the chance of calling upon Mr. Stacey at his home in the evening.

"I've seen you before, somewhere," hinted Mr. Stacey, at last.

"At a church club meeting in New York," Tom supplied. "Dr. Weissman introduced us."

"I remember you now, Stanley. Weissman said that a boy like you didn't need any one to build a college for him. Well, you are a hustler, to be selling marble at wholesale at your age. Have you had much success?"

"This is my first chance," our hero admitted, honestly.

"Oho! And so your future depends on how well you do with me."

"I suppose so," young Stanley assented. "But that has nothing to do with your deciding whether to trade with me."

"It has a good deal to do," contradicted the millionaire, beaming. "All my life I've tried to help young men forward. You appear to have the right stuff in you. I think, Stanley, if you want to write your firm to-night, you can say that I have been well impressed by you, and that I shall buy your firm's goods, through you, if your house can sell to me reasonably enough."

"Thank you."

"Better still, I can just as well write your firm myself," went on the old millionaire, kindly.

He touched a bell and sent for his stenographer.

A young woman entered, took a short letter from his dictation, then left the room.

She was back in a few minutes with the letter typewritten.

John Stacey signed it, giving it to the young woman to mail.

"There, that ought to be of some use to you with your house," smiled the old man. "Now you must see how reasonably you can get your firm to offer me the marble that I shall want."

"You may be very sure that I will," Tom cried, warmly.
"Mr. Stacey, how can I thank you?"

"By trying to do just as well with all the business you handle for your house. And now, Stanley, I think I will see you at my office at the factory at ten o'clock in the morning. I will try to have my builder there at that hour. We can talk matters over. Good-night."

"Good-night, and thank you, sir."

Tom left the house as if treading on air.

"If this goes through, a few thousand dollars in commissions! Whew! But that's different from seven per! Still," the boy reminded himself, more soberly, "it'll be only once in a few years that I'm likely to land as big an order as this."

Stacey's house was in the suburbs of Cincinnati.

At some distance below, on the avenue, was an open space, of vacant fields on either side.

Crouched in one of these fields was Carman, waiting for the boy.

But, just as Stanley came along, a roysterer party of young fellows halted in the neighborhood.

"That settles a great chance!" grunted Carman, angry with fate. "But no matter, there'll be other chances!"

Tom kept on his way, wholly unconscious of the narrow escape he had had, took a trolley car further on and reached his hotel.

At just a minute before ten the next morning, Stanley presented himself at the private office of John Stacey.

"Oh, come in and sit down," was the old millionaire's pleasant greeting. "I'm expecting Beaufort, my builder, every minute. Well, how do you like the looks of this, the biggest shirtwaist factory in the United States?"

"I've been paying a good deal of attention as I came through," Tom answered.

"What did you like best?"

"The brightness, the cleanliness of everything here," the boy answered.

"And the happiness and the cheeriness of the people? Did you observe that?" demanded John Stacey, rather eagerly, half proudly.

"I can't say that I did. I came through very quickly," Stanley replied.

"Well, you'll notice that if you have more time to look through," went on Stacey. "I might almost say that it's the law here that every employee must be happy. I always want to see every one happy. I've given orders to that effect to Hoggins, my foreman in the operating department. You must observe Hoggins, if you want to see an ideal foreman. He's a great, rough-looking fellow—a Hercules in an apron, in fact. Hoggins, though foreman at a salary of a few thousands a year, goes around just like one of the work-people. He understands that every one must be happy here, and he sees to it well. And I must say that happiness pays, for Hoggins certainly gets more work out of my people than any foreman I ever had. Why, Hoggins gets his pay raised almost every year, on account of the

more and more work that he gets out of the people through keeping them happy."

Tom discreetly said nothing.

As a matter of fact, in glancing in at the operating rooms it had seemed to him as if the men and women employed there acted as if they were driven by fear every minute of the time.

"I guess Hoggins pulls the wool over good old Mr. Stacey's eyes," thought the boy to himself. "From the way the people looked to me, Hoggins must be the kind of fellow who'd be a prize to a chap like Eben Dobson."

The bell of the desk telephone ringing, Mr. Stacey turned around to answer the call.

"That message was from Beaufort," explained the old millionaire. "He finds that he can't get here before eleven o'clock. Stanley, why don't you take a run through the factory? As bright a youngster as you are ought to be able to see some things on which you can report to me. And have a talk with Hoggins. He's the greatest prize, really, that I ever struck. If I lost him I don't know what would become of the profits of the place."

As the suggestion to run along amounted almost to a command, Tom rose and left the private office.

As Tom stepped into one of the operating rooms he was just in time to hear one girl ask another:

"What makes your left cheek so red, Annie?"

"That big brute, Hoggins, hit me a regular slap on the face," replied the girl.

"My, but your face is red!"

"Of course it is. And it smarts!"

"I wish Mr. Stacey could understand things here. I wish he could see your face, Annie."

"What good would it do? I'd only get discharged for lying. Mr. Stacey is an awfully good man, but he's stupid about some things. S'pose I was to show him my face and tell him what happened. Do you s'pose he'd b'lieve anything against the perfect Hoggins?"

Both girls started guiltily when they saw young Stanley close behind them. They turned speedily to their work, and Tom passed on.

"Just about the way I had things sized up," muttered Tom. "I've worked too long for Dobson not to know the signs. Hoggins and Dobson, they're about alike."

As he walked down the room our hero was just in time to see a big, rough-looking fellow seize a woman from behind by the shoulders.

"You young hussy, what are you wasting the boss's time for?" shouted the fellow. "I'll show you."

He ran the girl forcibly before him, hurling her at last so that he slammed her up against the wall.

Her face struck hard, blood spurting instantly from her nose.

She let out a little scream of terror that brought several other girls and a few of the men from their work.

Black looks were on nearly every face.

"Get back to your work, the rest of you jades," roared

the big fellow, brandishing his fists at the woman. "If you don't, I'll swat you all!"

"Who's the beast?" flared Tom, darting through the little throng, his face white and set with anger and the sense of outrage.

"It's Hoggins, the foreman," muttered some one in an undertone.

"You cur!" panted Tom, thrusting himself before the abused women.

With a snarl, Hoggins grabbed a club, but Stanley, looking swiftly around him, snatched up another.

"I'll slam ye down them stairs!" bellowed the bully, for Tom had halted just before the trap of a dark flight to a deep cellar below.

"Brag's a sneak of a dog!" jeered the boy. "A small dog in a big carcass is what you are!"

"Hurrah!" yelled some one faintly from the rear of the excited crowd of operators. "Pay him back for us!"

It looked like the most unequal kind of a match, if the fight started. But Tom's blood was up to boiling point. He did not care.

"Put down that stick, beg my pardon, and then get out of here, you kid!" raged Hoggins, glaring at the boy.

"When I get out it will be to go to the office and tell Mr. Stacey what I've seen," defied Tom.

"Oh, will it?" sneered the big brute, with a confident air. "Tell him, then. Mr. Stacey and I understand each other!"

"You lie, you big beast!"

That was too much. Hoggins saw all his authority slipping away from him if he allowed this to go unpunished.

With a roar, blinded with fury, he leaped forward, aiming a crushing blow at Tom Stanley's head.

Crash! The clubs met, in assault and parry.

Tom's arm was not strong enough to resist that of Hoggins.

The boy saved his skull from a breaking, but he sank to one knee.

Swift as a flash he brought his cudgel down.

Smash! It landed across Hoggins's left shin with a force that brought down the big beast in his turn, uttering a cry like that of a wounded bull.

Hoggins, in fact, landed on his knees, and, in trying to get away from a second blow of his young enemy's club, fell over on his side.

Then young Stanley fairly jumped on him, clutching at the brute's throat and holding on with all his might.

A buzz-zz of excitement ran through the group of startled onlookers.

Then, as Tom, his fingers still wound at the big fellow's throat, held on in strangling grip, a faint cheer sounded.

But the door flew open.

John Stacey, first attracted by the noise, next got an awful jolt.

For he saw his peerless foreman on the floor, prostrate, while hanging at the fellow's throat was the New York

boy whom the millionaire had believed to be a model youngster.

"Stanley!" shrieked the horrified John Stacey, leaping forward.

Then, sternly:

"What on earth are you doing here? How dare you? Get up! Leave here! Never let me see your face again! Go! Do you understand?"

With one hand John Stacey seized Tom's collar. With his other hand he boxed the boy's ears, then yanked our hero to his feet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MONKEY AND THE CATPAW.

Tom Stanley saw his big contract slipping away from him like lightning.

But, with his blood up, he cared for nothing.

"Mr. Stacey," he shouted, "you'd better stay in this room long enough to get an idea of how things are going in your factory!"

"Why, you impudent young scoundrel!" blurted the millionaire, angrily. "Hoggins, be good enough to put this boy out into the street."

"I certainly will, Mr. Stacey," growled the foreman.

But ere the brute could lay his hands on the boy, Tom darted swiftly to one side, again snatching up his club.

"Hoggins, you beast, if you haven't had lesson enough, close in and I'll give you another," warned Stanley.

"Stop this!" thundered John Stacey. "What do you mean?"

Then he turned to the foremost of his excited workmen.

"Go and get a policeman at once! We'll have this crazy young person properly attended to."

Hoggins had fallen back, plainly willing that his employer should settle the trouble for him.

But Tom was in no mood to be beaten so easily.

"Mr. Stacey," he went on, firmly, "I've no wish to meddle in your business. But I know the workingman's side in these troubles. You'll never have so good a chance again to look into affairs here in your own factory. I attacked your foreman because he struck a woman most shamefully."

"What crazy nonsense are you uttering?" demanded Mr. Stacey, angrily.

"Crazy, indeed!" roared Hoggins. "He ought to be sent to a lunatic asylum."

Tom, however, was still on his mettle.

"Mr. Stacey, this is your time to investigate. Just call your people before you and tell them to talk without fear or favor! Ask for the girl, Annie, who has a red welt on her cheek from the hand of Hoggins. And ask for the other girl that Hoggins slammed, face on, into a wall, making her nose bleed."

Mr. Stacey looked angry and puzzled, but Hoggins, a trifle alarmed, roared out:

"It's all an infernal lie!"

"Is it?" challenged Tom. "Mr. Stacey, step over here

with me and see the blood on the floor, under the wall. Then ask your people how it came here."

Hoggins darted forward, as if to prevent such a move, but Stacey, wheeling, stepped over to where the boy pointed.

"Blood!" he gasped.

"Ask for the girl who lost that blood under Hoggins's blow," insisted Stanley. "Tell all your people that they can talk now without fear so long as they stick to the truth! You men and women," shouted Tom, turning to the crowd, "just come forward and dare to call your souls your own!"

Again John Stacey gasped, but he saw something in the uncertain faces of his work-people that made him think swiftly.

"Go back to the office, sir," urged the foreman, "and leave me to straighten this matter out."

"No," replied the millionaire, drily. "I believe I'll stay and hear what any one may want to say."

"You'd best go back, sir. I understand handling these people better than you do."

"You see?" jeered the boy, triumphantly. "This fellow Hoggins is afraid that you may stay and hear. Mr. Stacey, please believe me for a minute or two at least. It'll be the best thing you ever did in this factory."

"Friends," addressed Mr. Stacey, holding up one hand that trembled, "is there any truth in the charges that this boy makes?"

Murmurs and uncertain looks were the only answer. No one knew, yet, which way the cat would jump.

"Speak without fear," their employer urged. "If things have been going wrong here, I want to know. No one shall be harmed for speaking the truth."

"Ask for that girl Annie who was struck in the face. Ask for the girl with the nose-bleed," prompted Tom, vibrating with the heat of the scene.

"If there are such people here let them come forward and speak," urged John Stacey.

As soon as they saw that their employer really meant it, the work-people came forward, first in pairs, then by dozens.

It was not long before Hoggins was cowering before the Babel of denouncing voices.

Then, all in less than five minutes, Hoggins, the peerless foreman, the specialist in happiness, was stripped of all his power.

"I've heard enough," declared Mr. Stacey, now shaking with a new kind of anger. "Hoggins, make your escape before I pay some of these men to thrash you!"

"But you don't understand anything about running operating rooms, sir," whined the fellow. "You don't know the kind of people I've had to deal with."

"I know that you're not fit to be in charge of a hogpen," retorted John Stacey, at white heat. "Go!"

Hoggins slunk after his street clothes. But as he passed our hero he growled:

"I'll get square with you! You've beat me out of a big-

paid snap, and I'll square things with you if I swing for it! Remember that!"

Tom, with a sneering smile on his white face, did not answer.

Instead, he turned to the old millionaire.

"Mr. Stacey, I'm sorry to have caused so much trouble," he began.

"Don't be sorry for anything," returned the old man, in a cold, hard voice. "It was time I knew. You have my thanks. But I feel too upset to talk business with you this morning. You'll excuse me, won't you? And wait to hear from me later?"

Tom, with a bow, turned and made his way through to the corridor.

But, as he went, scores of men and women insisted on shaking his hand, or at least touching him, in their wild joy over the downfall of the brute foreman.

"But look out for that Hoggins," whispered one man, warningly. "He's the ugliest man alive when he once gets badly roused. I'm afraid he'll risk his own life to be even with you."

Tom was still trembling with the excitement of the scene when he reached the street.

He walked briskly for some blocks before he cooled down a bit.

"I've lost that contract for the marble," he murmured sadly to himself. "But what could I do? I couldn't stand tamely by and see women slammed around by a brute. Neither could I stop, short of the end, either, when I once got roused in behalf of those people who didn't dare call their souls their own!"

Two blocks further on Tom wondered:

"Have I really lost Stacey's big order for marble? Why should I? He must certainly admit that I've done him a service. But I suppose I've made him feel thoroughly ashamed over what he didn't know before. After bragging to me about his perfect foreman, and then finding out the truth through me, it won't be in human nature for him to want to see me again. Oh, dear! Life is a blamed queer puzzle! Yes, I suppose I have lost the Stacey order for marble."

All afternoon our hero waited at the hotel.

In some way the evening newspapers got hold of the affair at the Stacey factory and published long stories about it.

"That's another nail in my coffin," grimaced the boy, as he saw the newspaper stories. "It isn't my fault, but it'll all help to make Stacey sore on me."

Another who saw the newspaper accounts was Carmichael, Dobson's villainous agent. He hunted up Hoggins, and the two had a long talk.

But in the middle of the evening, Tom, much to his surprise, received a telephone call from John Stacey.

It was an invitation to visit the millionaire at his home at once.

Be sure that Tom was there as quickly as he could make the trip!

"Stanley," began the old man, "I feel sure that you've been wondering how to-day's affair will affect your chances with me."

"I hope you won't feel inclined to blame me, sir."

"I don't, but I'm sorry those newspapers got hold of the affair. It will make me feel cheap before many of the people I know here in Cincinnati."

"I'm very sorry, sir," Tom replied, earnestly, "but I simply couldn't help it. I worked in one of the meanest offices in the country, and so I've had good chance to know what working people sometimes have to stand for the sake of not going hungry."

"I'm going to ask you to wait here in Cincinnati a few days," went on Mr. Stacey. "By that time I'll have gotten over this affair a bit, and then I'll be able to talk with you with more justice."

"That'll suit me in every way, sir," responded the boy, readily and eagerly.

He felt now that matters would soon be all right between this millionaire and himself.

It was rather late in the night when Tom Stanley left the Stacey mansion to return to town.

He walked briskly down toward the vacant fields.

Soon after leaving the Stacey stoop the boy heard a trilling whistle behind him, but he did not pay much attention to it.

That whistle was blown by Carman, hiding behind a neighbor's stoop!

"Some cop on the beat, probably," thought Tom, carelessly. "If I was to meet Hoggins just now I reckon I'd be glad to know there was a cop within reach of my voice."

There was no one else in sight as Tom started to walk by the vacant fields, but ere our hero had gone a hundred feet along the boundary fence a man jumped over the fence and stood squarely in his path.

"Hoggins!" gasped the boy, starting back.

But he was unprepared, while the ex-foreman was not.

With a snapping of the jaws, Hoggins leaped forward, wrapping his long, powerful arms about the boy, pinning Stanley's weaker arms against his side.

"Catch!" gritted the brute, lifting the boy, bodily, and passing him over the fence to another big fellow.

Like a flash, Hoggins vaulted the fence, clapping a broad hand over the youngster's mouth just as Stanley was about to yell for help.

"Ye don't make any noise here!" came in an angry growl in the youngster's ear. "We'll settle some scores to-night," rumbled on the brute, as he and his pal started to run across the field with their captive. "Do you remember my telling ye I'd swing for the sake of getting even? I meant it, kid!"

CHAPTER VII.

BLUFF AGAINST BRAWN.

"It's all up with me, if my wits can't save my neck!" flushed Tom, as, with his cries still shut off by that big hand over his mouth, he was rushed across the field.

At the further end of the field, near a lonely road, stood a long, low, shed-like building.

Some contractor had once used this building for the lodging of Italian laborers.

Now the place was deserted.

Hoggins, apparently, knew this part of the suburbs well.

"I'll take the kid," mumbled the ex-foreman, taking over the burden and shutting off Tom's speech by a tight, strangling clutch at his throat. "Run ahead and open the door."

The door of the shanty opened, Hoggins ran in with his captive.

Slam! went the door behind them.

Plainly this pair had carefully prepared for their evil work, for a lantern hung, lighted, from a hook.

"Get that club, Hank," gruffed the ex-foreman.

Then, as his comrade seized a cudgel, Hoggins stood the boy in a corner.

"If he lets out a yip," ordered the brute, hoarsely, "crack his head open."

"They'd do it, too," realized the boy, with a sinking at the heart as he looked at the ugly pair.

"Going to keep quiet?" leered Hoggins, glaring maliciously at his young enemy.

"Yes," mumbled Tom, trying hard to still the quake that was in his voice.

"Wise kid!" jeered the brute.

"If he'd a-kept quiet to-day he wouldn't be in this fix, from what I hear," laughed the ex-foreman's companion, roughly.

"No, he wouldn't," returned Hoggins, with a savage oath. "Kid, why did ye feel called upon to meddle in my affairs."

"Because your roughness made me mad," blurted Tom, with apparent honesty.

In his fast, young brain he was trying rapidly to form some plan of appeasing this brute who now stood at the top of the heap of vengeance.

"Made ye mad, eh?" quivered Hoggins. "Any idea how mad ye made me by working me out of a job worth four thousand plunks a year? And all because I swatted a girl or two!"

"I suppose those girls do try your patience a bit," Tom admitted.

"Oh! Tryin' to soft-soap me now, are ye?" raged the big fellow. "It's too late, kid. Ye've cost me the only snap I ever had in my life. Now there's nothing to do but choke off yer wind for good—and then go to the gallows for it, if I have to."

"I guess you haven't heard the news yet," hinted Tom, his plan, desperately foolish though it seemed, coming to him all of a sudden.

"News?" demanded Hoggins, in a voice that was thick with rage. "What news?"

"Why, after the whole row was over," Tom hurried on, "it struck me that I'd been just a bit too hasty."

"Oh, it did, eh?"

Words cannot describe the angry irony that rang in the ex-foreman's voice as he shot out that angry question.

"Now, understand me, Hoggins," continued Tom, with pretended sternness, and speaking with a world of sham bravery in his voice, "you don't do right to treat the girls the way you do at the factory. I don't excuse that in the least."

"Oh, ye don't?"

Again that ringing, savage irony.

"No, I don't. But that isn't the point. Sometimes it's easy enough to work a man out of a job, but it isn't so easy to find him another."

"What are ye talkin' about?" raged Hoggins, suspiciously.

"Have you any idea why I've been up to Mr. Stacey's house to-night?"

"I don't care what ye've been up there for. I've got ye now, and that's all I care about," answered the brute, harshly.

"Hoggins, I went up to Mr. Stacey to see if I couldn't do the right thing by you."

"Oh, yes, of course," sneered the brute, unbelievingly.

"Well, I did, just the same," lied Tom, for his very life. "I felt sorry, after the heat of it was all over, to think that I'd worked you out of such a good job. So I've been talking the whole thing over with Mr. Stacey. I reminded him what a capable foreman you were, in spite of your faults. Well, to make a long story short, Mr. Stacey is ready to put you back in your job to-morrow morning—on condition that you agree never to strike another woman."

"What?"

Bill Hoggins glared at the boy in utter disbelief.

It didn't tally at all, this yarn, with what the ex-foreman knew of his former employer.

"Well, you'll find out it's true," went on Stanley, warmly. "I've put in the whole evening getting you fixed back in your job—and this is the way you've planned to repay me—by luring me here to kill me!"

Bill fairly glared into the boy's eyes.

But Tom, remembering that he was working for his very life, forced himself to meet that angry look steadily.

"Ye little liar!" panted the brute.

"Oh," Tom shrugged his shoulders, "I can't make you believe, if you're too wise to understand the truth."

"So I'm to get my job back, am I, kid?"

"Yes, in the morning, if you promise never to strike another woman."

Bill's companion laughed, sneeringly.

"Ye're young, Bill, ain't ye?"

Hoggins clenched his fist, waving it before the boy's face.

"It's too thin, kid. It won't save yer life."

"Humph!" echoed Tom, fairly forcing a smile. "If my life is snuffed out to-night, your job goes with it."

"Does, eh?"

"You don't believe me, do you, Hoggins?"

"Was ye fool enough to think I would?" jeered the brute.

"Whether you believe or not, you'd better listen to the plan the way Mr. Stacey fixed it up with me."

"Go on," leered Hoggins.

"In the morning Mr. Stacey is to send for you. Then, before all his people I'm to ask that you be taken back again, on the single promise that you won't do any more hitting in the factory."

"Well?"

"If you make that promise, and of course you will, then you're to start in again, right away, and be foreman again as if nothing had happened."

Bill continued to glare at our hero for some moments before he queried harshly:

"Kid, where did ye take yer lessons in lying?"

"Why?"

"Ye had a crazy schoolmaster!"

"Oh, if you don't believe what I'm telling you——"

"I don't."

"Then your job stays up the spout. But if you do believe me——"

"And let ye go to-night, instead of gettin' even——" put in Bill, leeringly.

"Why, as far as my getting away from you is concerned, Hoggins, I'll tell you how you can let me prove what I say."

"Oh, ye can? How?"

"Why, take me to some telephone station, between you. But you'll have to do it quick, before Mr. Stacey has gone to bed."

"Of course!"

"Let me call up Mr. Stacey. I'll ask him some question about how I'm to find you in the morning. Then I'll follow that with other questions. You can stand right side of the telephone receiver, and you'll hear Mr. Stacey's voice. You'll hear enough to make you feel sure that he and I have planned just what I said."

"Nice plan," chuckled Hoggins, gruffly. "Once on a street, ye make a break, or hold up the first cop."

"If you see me doing anything of that sort you can pound me with a club that you can carry up your sleeve, can't you?"

"Yes, and be caught by the cop!"

"But you said you were willing to swing to get even with me. Besides, you must know this neighborhood well enough to know of some saloon or other place where you can get without passing a policeman. Oh, you can arrange it to take me to some telephone, without giving me any safe chance to get away."

"I suppose I could," sneered Bill Hoggins, "And I'm just big enough fool to think of doing it."

"Oh, all right, then," taunted Tom, shrugging his shoulders. "If you're going to be a fool right along, then go right ahead and kill me, as you threaten. After that, you can keep on running away from the police, who'll be trying to put a halter around both your necks. All that rather than go back to your big-pay job."

"Say, Bill," mumbled the other fellow, "maybe ye'd better give just a thought to this."

"Do ye take any stock in the kid's yarn?" demanded Hoggins, turning upon his companion.

"It may be true. And the kid has pointed out the right way to find out. We sure can take him to a safe place to telephone—and we sure can finish him at any point, if he tries to give us the criss-cross."

"Is it worth while?" asked Hoggins, wonderingly.

"Is it worth while, Bill, to take even a long, slim chance of getting a fine job back again? That's the way it looks to me."

Hoggins turned to Tom, whose pulses began to throb with hope.

"Kid, d'ye really understand that we can soak ye anywhere on the street and get away before the cops could reach us."

"Of course you can—if you've got the nerve," Stanley agreed, readily.

"And d'ye intend to keep quiet and go along with us and act right?"

"Why, of course. It's the only chance of keeping alive that I've got left."

"What d'ye say, Hank?" asked Hoggins, doubtfully.

"Try it. I think the kid knows he's got to act on the square."

"Come along, then," ordered the ex-foreman, thrusting one of his arms through our hero's. "Hank, ye get his arm on the other side. Stuff that little club of your'n up the sleeve of your idle hand, same as I'm doing. Now, kid, remember that a yip out of ye, before a cop or any one else, will settle for the cracking of your skull in a jiffy."

"Say, you make me tired," blurted Stanley, disgustedly. "Any one would think all I was going outdoors for was the pleasure of being killed by two desperate men."

"That's what we are," said Hoggins, grimly. "Desperate enough to run any chances."

They threw the door open, leading the way out.

At this side of the field it was hardly more than a few steps to the lonely road.

"Take him over to John's," whispered Hank. "That's a good, safe place as any."

Out on this road Tom had his eyes open.

He was fully prepared to make the first possible break for flight—his only chance of living more than a few minutes.

At first they passed only a few sheds and stables.

Not another living soul was in sight.

Then up a lane they turned, toward a building where a light burned outside.

"We'll soon know the truth now," muttered Hoggins, grimly.

It had come, then, the last moment of action.

For the place for which they were headed, from the fact of its having been chosen by Hoggins, must be some low den in which the rascals would be not only safe, but aided.

"Whoop! Wow!"

Yelling at his loudest, Tom suddenly and frantically wrenched himself free of both his captors.

His sudden, jerky yells aided him, by startling both his captors.

The very instant that he felt himself free of their combined clutch, Tom Stanley began to make his feet fly.

He had run before, at other times, but never as he traveled now.

Heading out of the alley, he struck straight into the road, heading for the distant lights of Cincinnati.

Back of him pounded his pursuers.

They did not waste any breath in calling to him, knowing well enough that nothing short of brute force could stop this fleeing boy.

Tom was light, agile, and this made him more speedy than his pursuers at the outset.

Yet our hero realized, plainly, that his grown-up enemies would probably develop better wind than he on a long run.

At the first corner Tom turned, heading for another street.

At the second corner he also turned.

He passed a house or two, now. In another full minute or two, he believed, he would reach a clump of houses that he saw not far off.

"Help! help!" he shouted. "Police! Murder!"

Swearing like a pirate, Bill Hoggins fell back.

"He'll rouse that neighborhood, Hank! Keep back a bit so we can get out of the way if we have to."

Fleeing Tom turned into another street.

Looking back, he could not see his enemies anywhere.

"But that's no sign they're not on the trail," flashed the boy.

Around another corner, and he could have cheered for joy.

Late as the hour was, a hack had drawn up before a house.

A woman was getting out of the cab, while the driver was busy with her trunk on the rack behind.

On the stoop of the house stood three or four people.

"If that cab isn't engaged, I'll hire the fellow to take me back into the heart of the city," panted the boy, slowing up.

As he drew near, the trunk slammed down to the sidewalk.

Tom could not help noting the initials painted on one end of the trunk—"E. W."

"Pleasant trip, Mrs. Wrenn?" hailed a man in the group on the stoop.

"Very," softly answered a soft-voiced, middle-aged woman from beside the cab.

"How is every one in Cleveland these days?"

"E. W.? Emma Wrenn? Cleveland?" flared through the boy's mind. "The name of the woman on the envelope that dropped out of old Dobson's pocket? He was so upset when he thought I was reading it!"

Tom was a-tingle with some sense of the mysterious that he could not understand.

Before he realized it, he had begun:

"Pardon me, madame."

"Well?" queried the woman, halting as she was about to go up the steps to her friends.

"Are you Mrs. Emma Wrenn, of No. 817 Vine Street, Cleveland?"

"Yes."

Tom's head began to throb with a new excitement.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY OF DOROTHY.

"Why have you stopped me?" questioned the woman. "Why do you question me?"

"Mrs. Wrenn," replied Tom, suddenly, desperately, cheekily, "I am certain that you will be surprised. But I am engaged in a most important undertaking, and I have been looking for you to help me."

This was out of whole cloth, but Tom believed it would arouse the woman's curiosity.

"You are talking in riddles," Mrs. Wrenn complained.

"You know Eben Dobson?" Tom shot out, plumply.

Mrs. Wrenn, to his great surprise, stepped back, almost staggering, while a look of terror shot into her eyes.

Then, as swiftly, she seemed to recover herself.

"You are right," she murmured, while those on the stoop above stood looking curiously down. "I will step aside and talk with you."

She clutched at his arm, her small hand trembling there.

"Let us walk down a little way," she whispered, agitatedly.

Then, when out of earshot of the others, the woman whispered:

"Why are you here?"

Tom hadn't the least idea of the answer, but he felt sure that he was stumbling upon something important.

"Can't you guess?" he asked, mysteriously.

"Tell me! Who sent you?"

"Suppose," hinted Stanley, "that I should mention the name of Eben Dobson?"

"Well?" demanded the woman, speaking steadily, though her hand still shook.

"And of Dobson's daughter?" added Tom.

"His daughter?" repeated the woman, in a puzzled voice.

"Yes."

"Her name?"

"Dorothy."

"How old is she?" asked Mrs. Wrenn, like one who did not know.

"Sixteen."

"That would take it back to the year 1890," murmured Mrs. Wrenn, in the tone of one who was solving a puzzle.

"Why, Eben Dobson wasn't married in that year."

Tom felt a great thrill of discovery.

Then Dorothy really wasn't old Dobson's daughter.

"Did you ever know Dobson's wife?" persisted Tom, swiftly.

"No; and never knew that he had a wife," returned Mrs.

Wrenn. "Why do you ask such questions if you come from Dobson? Are you poking fun at me? Or does it mean—"

The woman shrank back from the boy, looking at him with a new, wild light in her eyes.

But Tom was all eagerness now.

He no longer cared to know anything about Dobson, unless it was something that concerned Dorothy.

"Dorothy—who?" murmured the boy, under his breath.

"I feel that you are tricking me!" cried Mrs. Wrenn, with sudden suspicion in her voice. "Whoever you are, young man, you are prying into a past that does not concern you. Have you anything definite and straightforward to say to me? If not, I shall wish you good-night and hurry to my friends."

"Mrs. Wrenn," appealed Tom, desperately, "in questioning you I am anxious only to serve Miss Dorothy, the young woman whom Dobson claims as his daughter."

"I am not interested in her, as I never saw her or heard of her," broke in the woman, coldly. "And now, young man, I am going to leave you. For, whatever your errand here, it is not a friendly one to me. Good-night!"

Wheeling, more than half indignantly, Mrs. Wrenn hurried up the sidewalk to the stoop, then disappeared inside the house with her friends.

"Queer woman!" muttered Tom. "At first she thought she wanted to talk with me. I suppose that was because she thought I came from Eben Dobson. Then she told me she didn't know Dorothy—as if she could know Dobson all these years and not hear of his daughter. And now she seems half mad, half afraid. There's some unusual mystery in all this."

But it would never do to linger in this neighborhood, not knowing at what instant Hoggins and Hank might show up again.

First Tom looked at the door, getting the number.

"What street is this?" he asked the driver.

"Foam Avenue."

"Good! Now can you drive me back into town?"

"Yes."

"Drive fast, then, for I don't want to be overtaken by people who may be in this neighborhood."

Tom added directions as to where he wanted to go.

Within the next minute of speedy driving Tom felt that he was safely away from the men who, seemingly, had sought his life.

A few minutes later the cab, going at a slower rate of speed, was going through one of the principal streets of the city.

In the main entranceway of a hotel Tom saw Eben Dobson standing, finishing a cigar.

At the next corner Stanley pulled a check-strap.

"Drive around the corner and wait," he whispered, as he got out. "Here's some money, to show you that I'm not bluffing."

Then, keeping close to the building, our hero strolled back down the street.

"Eben and Mrs. Wren both in town," he murmured. "Something queer is happening. Can this affect Dorothy in any way? Anyway, I can torment Dobson."

Stanley's former boss was still standing there, having just tossed away his cigar.

"Good evening, Mr. Dobson," shot out Tom, pleasantly. The old man jumped as if some one had jabbed a pin in him.

"Rather fine town, Cincinnati," Tom observed, carelessly.

"Wh—what are you talking to me for, you young imp?" grated Dobson.

"Oh, I won't, if you object," smiled Stanley. "I was just wondering, though, if you came West in order to see Mrs. Emma Wren."

Again the old man started. There was a sudden pallor in his face now. His lips trembled. He started, once or twice to speak, then closed his mouth.

"Not that I'm very curious, or want to be nosey, you know," the boy went on, tantalizingly.

"Get out!"

"Why, certainly," Tom replied, obligingly, "if you take it that way."

With a mock bow, he turned and sauntered back up the street.

He turned at the corner, stepping into the hack.

"Just drive around the block as fast as you can," ordered Tom.

Almost in a jiffy the boy stood again on this principal street, below, instead of above, the hotel.

From a darkened doorway he watched the hotel entrance.

As it happened, he was just in time to see Eben Dobson come out again.

This time the old man walked sharply away, glancing at his watch.

"Follow that man at a little distance until we see where he's going," directed our hero.

The chase led straight to a railway station.

"You can follow that man inside and find out where he's going, can't you?" Stanley asked the driver.

"Sure!"

The driver was soon back.

"Train was just about to leave," reported the jehu. "So your party bought a ticket for Cleveland and got aboard."

"Cleveland?" uttered the boy, under his breath.

"Where now, boss?"

Tom gave the name of his hotel, then stepped inside the carriage again.

"Something up, sure, when Dobson is so upset at finding that I remembered the name of Mrs. Wren," guessed this young investigator. "So what does Eben do? Goes post-haste to Cleveland, where Mrs. Wren lives. Whee, but it looks as if Eben didn't know that Mrs. Wren is in this town!"

For an instant the notion came into Tom's mind that he should have followed Dobson to Cleveland.

"But that wouldn't be right," he told himself. "I'm

traveling on my employers' money, and I've got enough of their business to keep me tied right here in Cincinnati for the present."

At the hotel the boy paid his driver so well that the latter became talkative.

"You seemed mighty interested in that woman fare I had to-night?" he hinted.

"Yes," Tom admitted.

"Know her?"

"Not as well as I'd like to."

"I've been thinking about her ever since I took you for a fare to-night," the driver went on.

"Do you know her?" queried Tom Stanley.

"That's just the point, boss. It seemed to me that I ought to."

"Why?"

"Well, you know, old drivers like me often have a long memory for the faces of their fares. A good many years ago I used to drive in Chicago. If I didn't drive her there in Chicago, then it was her sister."

"What did you know about Mrs. Wren in Chicago?" Tom asked, with an eagerness that it was hard to conceal.

"Nothing beyond her name, and the fact that I drove her a few times. But her name wasn't Wren then."

"No."

"Seems to me it was Stacey."

"Stacey!" Tom lay awake long, thinking over the whole affair that night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STEADFASTNESS OF CRIME.

"Get that man to his room as quickly as you can!" said the hotel physician, in a low, tense tone.

There was excitement in the hotel breakfast room.

One of the guests at a table in a corner, a big, red-faced Englishman, had been taken suddenly ill as he was finishing his breakfast.

He was now so ill that he could not move himself.

Four hotel employes lifted the sick man, bearing him swiftly from the room, the hotel physician following.

"What's the trouble?" Tom asked of his own waiter, who had hastened over to the sick man's table, and who now came back.

"Doctor thinks the man has been poisoned," replied the waiter, in a low tone. "I wonder if anything wrong got into that steak he was served with?"

"Why?"

"Well, he got the steak that was to have been served to you."

"To me?"

"Yes; you both ordered rare steaks. I was just going to take that steak up for you, for I had ordered it for you. But I turned and saw that you had left the dining-room."

"I went after a morning paper."

"So I let another waiter have the steak for the Englishman."

Tom's face suddenly looked queer and white.

"See here, waiter, are there any strangers working in the kitchen or near there? Or any stranger loafing around there?"

"We put on a new man in the kitchen this morning—a man to do the meat broiling."

"What does he look like?"

The waiter described him.

"The man Dobson hired to do me up on the train!" quavered Tom to himself. "Dobson must have communicated with him last night, after leaving here!"

"What's wrong?" asked the waiter.

"I'll bet I know that new man in your kitchen," Stanley retorted, drily, white to the lips, nevertheless. "Get what's left of that steak, if you can. It was poisoned—and it was meant for me."

As for Tom, he raced down to the further end of the dining-room, the head waiter following in haste.

But the new kitchen helper, the broiler, had already disappeared.

"You needn't look for him to come back," grimaced young Stanley, after he had heard a further description of the fellow who had broiled the steak. "That fellow got his job here on purpose so he could poison me. He failed, for another poor fellow got the dose that was meant for me."

"You'll have to go at once and furnish information to the police, sir," suggested the head waiter.

"Yes; but not until I've seen how that unlucky Englishman is coming out," Tom retorted.

He found the number of the Englishman's room, and hurried up there, waiting quietly outside the door.

After twenty minutes the hotel physician came out.

"My patient is going to do all right," he reported, quietly. "That poisoner, like many of his kind, put in an over-dose. The over-dose saved my patient. He is going to pull through all right."

The physician listened in keen interest to what our hero had to say.

"You'll have to report that to the police at once," suggested the doctor. "Our hotel people will do the same. We must catch the scoundrel."

But Tom begged off for ten minutes.

In that time he got old John Stacey over the telephone wire and told him of the meeting of the night before with Hoggins and his pal.

"It seems to me, sir," Tom added, "that I ought to put the police on their trail at once."

"Most surely you had," Mr. Stacey replied, heartily. "And I will notify the police that I offer a reward of a thousand dollars for the capture of Hoggins. Go ahead."

So Tom went with the hotel manager to the nearest police officer.

Within ten minutes after that visit ended the police of the city were searching for all three of Tom's enemies.

"I hope they get 'em," Tom muttered to himself. "It's mighty uncomfortable to wander about, not knowing what

instant some crook will succeed in his ambition to take your life."

He had told the police nothing about Mrs. Wrenn, and little about Eben Dobson.

"Somewhere in that tangle," he murmured to himself, as he stood before his hotel, thinking, "there is something that concerns Dorothy. Now, I'm not going to mix her affairs up, if I can help it, in a police tangle."

"But if Dobson is again anxious to have me out of the way, it isn't for business reasons," the boy mused on. "It isn't because I'm with a rival house. Dob wouldn't stoop to murder—wouldn't dare to—for no better reason than that."

So it must be something in connection with Mrs. Wrenn, our hero decided.

"And it's something blamed big and serious," Stanley concluded, after going over all he knew of the matter. "It must be something, too, that concerns Dorothy, for I sha'n't soon forget how staggered the old man seemed when I got mad and blurted out that Dorothy wasn't his daughter."

But Tom presently decided that, if he tried to think the whole matter out on the small amount of information that he now possessed, he would get only a headache for his reward.

"Hold on!" he grunted, with a sudden start. "Eben Dobson won't find Mrs. Wrenn in Cleveland. If he gets on her trail at all, that trail will bring him back here from Cleveland. I wonder when the next train gets in from that city?"

He ran into the commercial room of the hotel, found a time-table and ran hastily over it.

There was a train from Cleveland due in about half an hour.

"I'll see if Dob comes in," muttered the boy, rising. "Would it be better to hide, and shadow Dob, as he arrives, or would it be the wise thing to march right up to him and tackle him. The way he has been acting lately it wouldn't take such a lot of bluff to smash his nerve down altogether."

Tom set out for the depot, walking briskly.

He had still more than ten minutes to spare by the time that he reached the tracks for the incoming trains.

"I want to meet a friend, and I don't want to wait out here in the crowd," whispered the boy, edging up to the gate-tender's side and slipping a dollar-bill into the man's hand.

By that kind of gentle persuasion he slipped past the gate, walking out along the platform beside the track.

Nor had he long to wait.

The train, on time, soon appeared at the head of the yard.

A few others had succeeded in slipping past the gate, but Tom, with his mind keenly on his own business, paid little heed to them.

"If that train is bearing Dobson," throbbed the boy, "there may be some interesting developments soon."

He walked half way down the platform, followed by some of the other people.

Passengers had already begun to crowd the steps of the incoming train.

Tom looked at them, but did not discover Dobson among them.

"He'll be one of the last off," murmured the boy.

The engine, rolling ponderously along, had now almost reached the little group.

Its great wheels revolved grindingly, and rather fast, considering how soon the stop must be made.

"Oh, look out! Don't!"

Tom heard that frantic scream in a woman's voice, but he had no time to think what it meant.

He was seized from behind, pitched headlong before the locomotive.

CHAPTER X.

TRAPPED TIGHT!

In the brief instant that Tom Stanley saw that huge engine grinding down upon him it looked bigger than a battle-ship and twice as destructive.

He landed on his hands, nearly across the track, his legs up in the air for a brief instant.

Then the cow-catcher hit him.

Crunch! That was what it felt like.

But instead of being ground under the wheels, the engine all but stopped then under the engineer's guiding hand.

Flop! Tom landed past the track, a bit bruised, but with nothing broken.

In a twinkling he was up.

Realizing that the big engine had stopped, he darted across the track.

"Catch the fellow that did that!" he roared.

But there was little need to shout, for two or three by-standing men, after their first gasp of horror, started after the criminal who had tried to kill the boy.

Carman, for it was he, was caught at the gate and held fast, despite his struggles.

In those struggles, however, he lost the black beard with which he had concealed his face.

And now the passengers from the train were thronging up, eager for a share in the excitement.

"Do you know this man?" demanded a policeman, who had taken Carman away from his first captors.

"Sure I do," snorted Tom. "Take him to the Esperance Hotel, and show him to the kitchen folks. They'll tell you that this fellow poisoned a steak there this morning, and that some one else got it instead of me. He was hired to kill me!"

"Esperance Hotel?" repeated the policeman, swiftly. "Why, we've got a general alarm to look for this fellow."

"And you've got him now," clicked Tom. "Though you'd have missed him in that false beard."

Then, wheeling, Tom let his eyes rove over the crowd that was pressing up against him from the train platform.

One man was there who shrank back, as if highly eager to escape notice.

"Howdy, Mr. Dobson," called Tom, mockingly. "Do you happen to recognize the prisoner?"

"Did you address me?" asked Eben Dobson, stiffly.

"Well, rather!" mocked Tom. "Is this man yours?"

"What do you mean?" quavered the old man.

"Do you know the prisoner?" demanded the cop, fastening his gaze on Tom's former boss.

"No!" quaked Dobson, promptly.

"Do you charge this man with having any connection with the prisoner?" questioned the policeman, turning around on our hero.

"I'd like to," quoth Tom, promptly. "I'd like to mighty-ily, for I know that your prisoner was working for this man, Dobson, who used to be my boss."

"Have you any proof that the prisoner served this man Dobson in trying to kill you?" persisted the officer.

"That's just the trouble," Tom gritted. "Not a particle of proof. Only my own knowledge."

With that Eben Dobson regained confidence at the rate of a mile a minute.

"This is all a scandalous lie!" he protested, hoarsely. "I know nothing about your prisoner, officer."

"I suppose," mocked Tom, "that you haven't seen him since you two traveled on the night express from New York. Do you happen to remember, Dobson, the little whispered talk you had before upper-four when you thought my berth was upper-fourteen?"

Dobson started, quivering slightly, but he retorted:

"I don't know what you're talking about, boy."

"Maybe you don't know me, either," flared Tom. Eben Dobson hesitated for an instant.

Then, with an ugly flash of his eyes he rejoined:

"You used to work for me. Oh, yes, I know you—but I don't know much good about you."

"Saw off the game of talk and hang somebody!" jeered a spectator in the crowd.

"I'm sure of this prisoner of mine," announced the officer. "He's the one I was told to look out for. So I'll take him along. Now, young man, you don't want to make any complaint against this party you call Dobson?"

"It wouldn't do any good," Tom answered. "I couldn't prove anything."

"You'll have to come along with me as a witness," suggested the officer.

So Tom and Carman drove to a police station in the same patrol wagon. But with this difference—that Tom soon after left the station-house, while Carman did not.

"What fiends there are in this world!" grunted the boy, as he started back to the hotel. "Hoggins and his pal are not a bit better than Carman. When they're jugged, too, maybe I can walk around the block with a feeling of safety. Shall I go to the hotel where I saw old Dob last night? But what's the use? If he's there now he wouldn't have a word with me."

So Stanley journeyed back to his own hotel.

There didn't seem to be much to do.

John Stacey had asked him to wait a few days on the business matter, and so there was nothing doing in that direction.

Our hero wrote a short letter to Brander & Son, his employers, after which he went up to his room, after having discovered that the Englishman who had eaten the poisoned steak was now out of danger.

Through a good part of the afternoon Tom slept in his room.

Toward evening he rose, took a bath, and then went down to supper.

After that, time hung heavily.

At last, buying some reading matter, he went up to his room with it.

He had not been seated more than ten minutes when there came a ring on the private telephone in his room.

"That you, Mr. Stanley?" hailed a clerk's voice from the office below. "Wait a moment."

Then another voice was switched on to the wire.

"That Mr. Thomas Stanley?"

"Yes."

"At the Esperance Hotel?"

"Yes."

"I am talking for Mr. John Stacey."

"Oh! Good! Go ahead."

"Mr. Stacey will see you this evening."

"But he told me yesterday that he wouldn't want to see me for a few days."

"He has changed his mind, Mr. Stanley."

"I am glad of that," laughed Tom. "At what hour does he want to see me?"

"As soon as you can come out this evening."

"All right."

"And say!"

"Well?"

"You've been having so much trouble lately that Mr. Stacey asks you to come out in a cab. He thinks you'll be safer. In fact, Mr. Stacey insists that you use a cab. He'll pay for it."

"All right. And thank Mr. Stacey for me, please."

"Then you'll be out right away?"

"I'll start at once."

"Then I'll tell Mr. Stacey. Good-bye."

Two minutes later our hero left his room, went downstairs and through the office.

To the driver on the box of a cab before the hotel entrance our hero gave the millionaire manufacturer's address.

Then Tom leaned back in comfort on the cushions.

"This cab habit ain't a bad one," he murmured, luxuriously. "I wish I could afford to keep one of my own."

By degrees they left the more crowded part of the town behind.

At last the vehicle turned out on the avenue on which Mr. Stacey lived.

"I wonder if he'll have the builder there to-night to talk

over matters?" wondered the boy. "Or does he want to see me just for a little social chat?"

Suddenly the cab stopped.

Tom leaned forward, to see if they reached the Stacey house.

Not by considerable! The vehicle had stopped just before those same vacant fields of tragic memory.

Then, before our hero could quite realize what had happened, one of the doors flew open.

The big, ugly, sinister face of Bill Hoggins loomed in the doorway as the brute shot out his arms to grab the boy.

In the same instant the other cab door opened and the driver pounced in.

"Help!" was all Tom had time to shout.

Even that cry was hushed in his mouth, for these scoundrels had a heavy grip on his throat.

"Now we'll see if ye'll git away this time!" jeered Bill Hoggins, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST TRUMP!

Slam! Over the fence, into the field, went Tom, and Hoggins landed on him, choking him.

Then the brute grabbed him up and bore him swiftly across the field through the darkness of the black night.

In the middle of the field Bill threw him down again, keeping an oppressing hand at the boy's throat.

"Turned the police loose on me, did ye?" growled Bill.

"Wouldn't you, if anybody used you the same way?" gurgled Tom.

He couldn't talk loudly, for the wary brute didn't allow enough air to pass down the boy's wind-pipe.

"Ye'll never give me any more trouble," retorted Hoggins, decisively. "Ye'll never get away again! Ye've played yer last trick on Bill Hoggins. The only trick left is the one that I'm going to play!"

"You're going to kill me, eh?" Tom murmured, hoarsely.

"Surest thing that ever happened to any one."

"Then I'll be mighty sorry for one thing."

"Will, eh? What?"

"I'd like to be alive at the time you're led to the gallows," grimaced the boy. "I'd like to see just how much nerve you'll have when they're fitting the noose around your neck!"

"Stop that!" growled Bill Hoggins, hoarsely.

"Frightens you, does it?" jeered the boy.

"Never you mind!"

"Oh, you'll be more frightened still, when the hanging time gets around. But don't take it too much to heart, Hoggins. The strangling doesn't last more than twenty minutes."

"You infernal, tormenting kid!" raged the brute.

"Say, Hoggins, do you believe much in ghosts?"

"What are ye talkin' about?" demanded the brute, thickly.

"If I'm killed, you'll soon know all about ghosts."

Tom could feel, with inward glee, that the hand at his throat was trembling.

"I don't know, Bill, but what I'm glad you're up to this game," went on the boy, hoarsely. "If it wasn't for this, there might not be much chance of your being hung."

"Hung?" repeated the ex-foreman, adding an oath. "Ye're so glad it may happen to me that I'll give ye a taste of it now!"

Grip! His big hand, becoming steadier, clutched at the youngster's wind-pipe until Tom Stanley felt life rapidly slipping away from him.

Then the pressure stopped, the boy gasping and gulping, unable to speak much above a whisper.

"I'm giving you a taste of what you're talkin' about," leered the ex-foreman.

"Having a cat-and-mouse time?" whispered the boy, grimly.

"I'm waitin' for my pal that drove ye here," chuckled Bill. "He's got to put his rig up somewhere. Ye'll have another ride in that to-night—but ye won't know anything about it then!"

Was that driver Hank in disguise? Tom wondered.

But, no! The two men were of different builds.

Evidently Hank had weakened from going further in crime with Bill Hoggins.

"Here comes the pal," gloated Hoggins, suddenly. "He's bringing the club, too, I see. I'm going to gag ye, and then pound the life out of ye! It'll be as pleasant as the hanging ye're figgering on having yer ghost see, won't it?" jeered the big fellow.

"You think you're going to have fun with me?" whispered the boy, hoarsely. "But wait! Wait! My ghost will haunt you all the time! Hoggins, I'll haunt you until I have the satisfaction of seeing you driven so crazy that they'll put you in a straight-jacket. Your torment will last a long time. Oh, wait!"

Bill leaned back, shaking. He was fearfully superstitious, and Tom, having discovered that fact, was trading on it.

"There's the great, white haunt of some one behind you now—pointing a blazing finger at you!" gurgled Stanley, pretending to show fright in his own eyes.

With a stifled yell, Hoggins fell back and turned.

That instant was enough for desperate Tom Stanley.

He squirmed away, bounding to his feet all in a second.

Straight across the field he dashed, running with all his might.

Further down the field, not far away, was the driver.

But Tom veered away from him at almost right angles.

"Stop him!" screamed the ex-foreman, himself pounding the ground hard.

Both pursuers were dangerously close as Tom neared the fence.

Could he clear that barrier?

With an inward prayer Tom reached the fence.

Still praying, Tom took the jump.

On hands and knees he landed on the sidewalk beyond

as Bill and his companion reached the other side of the fence.

Up once more!

Tom was sprinting straight up the avenue, with but a single thought.

Yet the sounds of pursuit showed him that his pursuers did not mean to give up the chase.

Tom was heading for John Stacey's house.

He reached the stoop. As he wheeled and whirled up the steps he saw that his pursuers were nearly two hundred feet behind him.

The front door was locked—of course!

But Stanley did not even try that door until he had first furiously jabbed at the electric button.

Now he turned to face his pursuers.

They were almost at the stoop, panting, but still strong enough to make a desperate fight.

"Help! Murder!" yelled Tom Stanley, at the top of his voice.

Then Bill Hoggins darted up the stoop!

"Take that!" roared Tom, reaching forward with one fist.

Bill tried to parry, but there wasn't any blow to parry.

For, instead, Tom drew swiftly back, raising one foot and planting it heavily on the brute's abdomen.

Bill groaned and went down.

His pal, with a curse, dragged Hoggins sheerly out of the way, past sight from the doorway.

Then back came this pal.

He darted up the steps, more on his guard than Hoggins had been.

Tom struck out, but it was no use.

In another instant he and the scoundrel were wrapped in a close lock, struggling like fiends.

Then the door flew open and John Stacey appeared there, backed by two men servants.

"Help! help!" panted Tom.

Tom's assailant did not let go, but on the contrary fought harder to drag the boy down the stoop.

"Jump in and stop that!" ordered Mr. Stacey, turning to his men servants.

"Here, now, with yez!" roared a newcomer on the scene.

A man in police uniform darted at the contestants, at the same time waving back the Stacey servants.

"I'll take charge of these fighters!" roared the man in blue. "Get back there!"

Tom Stanley felt the grip of fate tightening around him as he heard that half-disguised voice and stared at the face of the newcomer.

For that "policeman" was Hoggins's pal, Hank, in some stolen uniform!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

The policeman was tightly gripping Tom's late assailant with one hand, and our hero with the other.

"Mr. Stacey," cried Tom, piteously, "don't allow this outrage! This fellow isn't a policeman at all. He—"

"Shut up!" roared Hank, shaking the boy hard.

"—is the pal of Hoggins," finished Tom, desperately. "Down on the sidewalk you'll find Hoggins himself, unless he has run away!"

"This must be explained!" cried Mr. Stacey, running down the steps.

"No explanation needed, sir," retorted Hank, crisply. "I'm an officer. Don't interfere with me."

"But what are you doing with that boy for a prisoner?" insisted Mr. Stacey.

"I've got my orders from headquarters—that's all, sir," blurted Hank.

"He's no policeman, I tell you, Mr. Stacey," insisted the boy. "He is Hoggins's pal. They're trying to murder me—this crowd!"

"Get back in the house there, all of you!" ordered Hank, briskly. "If you don't, there'll be some of you get hurt."

Wrench! Watching his chance in those desperate moments, Tom Stanley fairly tore himself out of Hank's clutch.

He darted up the steps, behind the astonished men servants.

"Mr. Stacey," cried the boy, from the inside of the hallway, "if that villain claims to be a policeman tell him you'll telephone the station-house and see what the real police say."

One of the men servants raced into the hallway.

A second later they could hear a telephone bell tinkling.

"Give me police headquarters in a rush!" shouted the servant.

Two more men servants appeared at that moment.

Hank hesitated for an instant.

Then, kicking Hoggins, he gruffed:

"Git and hike!"

All three of the scoundrels put off in hot haste, "Police-man" Hank leading the way with a fine start.

"Have you got police headquarters?" cried Mr. Stacey, hurrying into the hall.

"Here they are, sir."

"Shut that door, and all of you stay on guard," called back John Stacey, as he hurried to the 'phone.

In a few terse, snappy sentences, the old millionaire informed the real police what had been taking place on his stoop.

Then he turned around to our hero.

"My lad," the old man went on, calming down wonderfully quick, "come into the library with me."

They entered the library side by side.

There awaited another surprise for our hero.

A man who had been seated there rose quickly from an arm-chair.

He faced the boy, gaspingly.

"You—here—Eben Dobson?" panted the boy.

"Well, why shouldn't I be here?" blustered the old rogue. Tom turned to his host.

"Dobson has got on the trail of the same business that brought you here, Stanley," smiled Mr. Stacey, who was still somewhat pallid from the recent excitement.

"After the marble contract?" inquired our hero.

"Yes," replied Mr. Stacey.

"Then, perhaps, I'd better go in another room, if you gentlemen have business to talk over," hinted Tom.

"It is not necessary," replied Mr. Stacey, rather coldly. "I doubt if Mr. Dobson expects to get the business away from Brander & Son."

"But why not, Mr. Stacey?" demanded the old rogue, almost sharply. "Do the Brander people offer you any better goods or terms than I can? Why should this boy carry the order away from an old veteran in marble like myself?"

"I've half agreed to give the order to Stanley's firm," replied Mr. Stacey, coldly. "I was about to tell you that, Mr. Dobson, when the doorbell rang so hard."

Dobson had at least one virtue in business. He knew when to quit. Now he saw that there was no prospect whatever of his landing an order with this millionaire manufacturer. So he reached for his hat.

"Just one minute, Mr. Dobson, if you please," broke in the boy. "I have a question that I want to ask."

"I don't want to hear it," retorted Stanley's former boss, testily.

"Mr. Stacey," shot out our hero, "may I ask if you know anything about a woman who once went by the name of Stacey, and who now calls herself Emma Wrenn?"

Eben Dobson stifled a scream down into a snort.

But he no longer seemed anxious to go.

"Stacey? Wrenn?" repeated the old millionaire, slowly. "I don't know of any such person. Why do you ask?"

"Of course you don't know of any such person," grated in Eben Dobson, hoarsely. "Mr. Stacey, this boy is one of the biggest liars that ever breathed."

"Never mind that," Tom retorted, warmly. "I am interested in this woman I speak of, and in some way I have gotten an idea that Mr. Stacey will be interested in her, too."

"He won't!" interrupted Dobson, hoarsely.

"Mrs. Wrenn is in this town, Mr. Stacey," Tom went on. "In fact, she's not far from here at this moment. Somehow I've a notion that you ought to see her."

"In town? Near here?"

The words came falteringly from Dobson's lips. His hat fell from his nerveless fingers. He bent to the floor to pick it up again.

"The fact that Mrs. Wrenn is right close at hand seems to upset our friend," hinted Tom, maliciously. "Mr. Stacey, doesn't it seem rather plain that our friend, Dobson, would rather not have you listen to talk about Mrs. Wrenn?"

"It does look that way," admitted the old millionaire.

Tap! tap! sounded at the door.

John Stacey opened to his butler.

"Two policemen are here, wishing to see you, sir," announced the butler.

"Ask them to wait a few minutes, Johnson."

"Yes, sir."

Now the old millionaire manufacturer wheeled around upon Eben Dobson.

"Dobson, have you any explanation to offer me regarding this Wrenn woman?"

"Not a word, Mr. Stacey."

"Don't you think, Mr. Stacey," broke in Tom, "that it would be a good idea to send for the woman? She would come, I think, if you were to send her word. She might be able to clear up something that seems to be in the wind."

"Where is she?" asked the old millionaire.

Tom gave the number on Foam Avenue.

"I think," announced Mr. Stacey, "that I'll call for my carriage and drive down there."

"Don't you do such a foolish thing," protested Dobson, trying to laugh. "This looks some like a trap or snare against you, Mr. Stacey. You don't know the trickiness of this boy as I do."

"Dobson, your very anxiety not to have me meet this Wrenn woman gives me all the stronger idea that I ought to," commented Mr. Stacey.

"I'm going, then, Mr. Stacey, if I can't serve you with my advice," suggested Dobson, again moving toward the door.

But John Stacey leaped into the path of the rogue.

"My dear fellow," warned John Stacey, his voice ringing, "if you attempt to leave this house for the present I'll turn you over to one of the two policemen whom you heard my butler say are waiting at the door."

"Turn me over to the police?" gasped Dobson, recoiling. "What for?"

"I'll take a chance on turning you over to the police, if you try to leave this house before you receive my permission," warned the old millionaire, while Tom Stanley stood looking on in breathless excitement over this scene which he had stirred up. Dobson, I've been looking at you. I think I know you! I only wonder that my eyes did not discover one or two things sooner than they did. But my eyes are growing old."

"I don't understand you at all," bluffed Dobson.

"Do you want to leave, knowing as you do that the attempt will result in your falling into the hands of the police?"

"No," quaked the old rogue, sinking into the nearest chair.

John Stacey again rang for his butler.

"Johnson, I'll speak to the policemen as I go out. I want you to stay in the room here and keep your eyes on Mr. Dobson. If he tries to leave, turn him over to the police officers on my complaint."

"Very good, sir."

A footman came to say that the carriage was at the door.

Mr. Stacey's footsteps could be heard passing down the hallway.

Tom took to walking softly up and down the room. By

and by the motion irritated the old rogue, who looked up at him, snarling:

"You young scoundrel!"

"You called me that once before, Dob," smiled the boy, halting and looking at his former employer. "But, somehow, you don't look quite as jaunty and important as you used to when you bullyragged your poor clerks in your New York counting-room."

"So you've been living just to try to get me into trouble, have you?" snarled the old rogue.

"Perhaps I've been fighting back a bit in self-defense, Dob. If you had kept out of my way you might never have seen me again."

Turning on his heel, Tom resumed his pacing of the room. The minutes lagged, as they always do in times of suspense.

But at last the doorbell was heard ringing.

John Stacey stepped in. On his arm was "Mrs. Emma Wrenn," looking wonderfully happy.

"Oh, Tom Stanley, how much I owe to you to-night!" cried the old millionaire. "Your news has reunited me with the wife I had believed to be dead."

A groan of terror came from Eben Dobson.

"You infernal scoundrel!" quivered John Stacey, leaving his wife and striding angrily over to Dobson.

For an instant every one else present expected to see the old millionaire strike the rogue.

But Mr. Stacey recovered himself with a great effort.

"The serpent that destroyed my happiness through the best years of my life!" uttered Mr. Stacey. "You, Eben Dobson!"

Then, turning away from the wretch, and going back to his wife, the old millionaire called the boy over to them.

"My dear, try to express your thanks to young Stanley, who has been the sole means of bringing this happiness about."

Mrs. Stacey tried to thank the boy, but her voice broke down, though her eyes swam with the tears of happiness.

"You are wondering what it all means, Stanley," went on the old millionaire. "The more you guess, the further you will be from the truth. It is a story of such infamy as I have never heard before. But you, who have done so much for us, are entitled to know. I think I can tell you briefly.

"A good many years ago I lived in Chicago. I was prospering fairly in those days, and I had married a wife who had at least a quarter of a million dollars in her own right.

"Our best friend—so we thought—in those days was a man named Edward Stevens. That was the name Dobson once went under. How many other names he has had in his life I don't know—or care now.

"At one time when this fellow, Dobson or Stevens, happened to be at our home, my wife had prepared a tempting dish for my luncheon. She had cooked it herself, and was very proud of it. One article that she wanted to flavor the dish with she sent Dobson out to get.

"I ate some of the food before they tried it. I was taken

violently ill. Dobson told her that the clerk at the store must have made some mistake in the flavoring. He told her he would get me to a hospital at once.

"He took me away to a private sanitarium, kept by some rascally doctor. Later in the afternoon he went to my wife and told her that I had died. Then he obtained some of the food, saying he would take it to a chemist. He soon came back to my frantic wife, saying that the chemist had reported arsenic as being in the food.

"Then, in a pretended fright, Dobson told my wife that they would both be charged with poisoning me. The poor girl was so afraid of courts that she collapsed. Dobson cunningly persuaded her to leave Chicago with him. He took her to a place of hiding.

"Later he told her that the police were searching everywhere for her, on a charge of having poisoned me. He told her of the large sums of money that would be needed in directing suspicion away from her. Bit by bit he forced her to sign her entire fortune away to him.

"That doctor at the sanitarium must have been in Dobson's pay. He kept me a close patient for weeks, and when I was allowed to go my mind was so weak that Dobson took me away for rest. After a while he told me of my wife's death, and showed me a pretended certificate of that death.

"In despair I signed papers authorizing Dobson—Stevens he then called himself—to dispose of my home and business, as I never wanted to return to Chicago.

"So you can see how well this scoundrel has covered up his tracks through these years. He tried to induce my wife to go abroad to live, but that she utterly refused to do. She settled in Cleveland, Dobson furnishing her with money enough to barely live along.

"Some years ago my wife saw my name in the band of a shirtwaist that she bought. It affected her strangely. She wrote to Dobson, whose change of name she knew, of course. He soon wired her from Cincinnati that the party she mentioned was not her husband. Then he hastened on to Cleveland, and assured her that I was not the same man who had been her husband—in fact, could not be since I had been dead more than sixteen years."

"And when our child was born," broke in Mrs. Wrenn, falteringly, "he told me that she had died. I believed him, since he showed me the certificate of her death."

Tom tore frantically at his inner vest pocket. Then he thrust a photograph of Dorothy before the startled woman.

As the woman stared at the pretty, girlish, pictured face, Tom's eyes scanned Mrs. Stacey's face.

The resemblance between Dorothy and Mrs. Stacey was not to be denied.

"Oh, John," cried the woman, thrusting the card into her husband's shaking hands, "this must be our child—the daughter you never saw!"

"Is it?" thundered John Stacey, striding up to where Eben Dobson cowered.

"Yes!" came the hoarse admission.

It seemed to three eager travelers as if the next morn-

ing's eastbound, lightning express would never reach New York.

But it did, and the Staceys were reunited.

Eben Dobson came east on the same train, under the watchful eyes of two private detectives.

Within forty-eight hours the rogue had been compelled to restore, with interest for all those years, the fortune out of which he had swindled Mrs. Stacey.

It took the last penny of the scoundrel's fortune, but John Stacey relentlessly forced him to give up all.

"Such villains should never have money. They use it only for harm," was Mr. Stacey's comment.

Then came the question of rewarding Tom Stanley.

Miss Dorothy's attitude made it necessary, also, to consider what a son-in-law named Stanley should do to take his place in the world.

So the former business of Dobson & Company came over into Tom Stanley's hands, and there was joy in one counting-room.

Tom merged the business with that of Brander & Son, taking a partnership with that latter firm. He is still a partner.

Dorothy, never having been named by her mother, still retains the name of Dorothy—with the name of Stanley added.

Mr. Stacey has retired from business, and has bought a country home in Westchester, near New York.

Every Saturday night Tom Stanley, now at the top of the heap in his line of business, takes his young wife up to spend over Sunday with "the old folks."

With them often goes Tom's chum, Bob Ellert, now one of the managers for Brander, Son & Stanley.

Eben Dobson, stripped of his ill-gotten fortune, soon took to swindling, was caught at it, and is now in prison.

By one of Fate's strange pranks he is a convict in the same prison with Carman and with Hoggins and his two pals. The last three were caught within a week after their last attempt upon our hero's life.

It goes without saying that the Brander firm got the contract for supplying the marble for building Burdick College.

(THE END.)

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